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abstracta

Linguagem, Mente & Ação

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Editors

André Abath

Leonardo de Mello Ribeiro

A symposium on Michael Slote's
The Ethics of Care and Empathy
(Routledge, 2007)

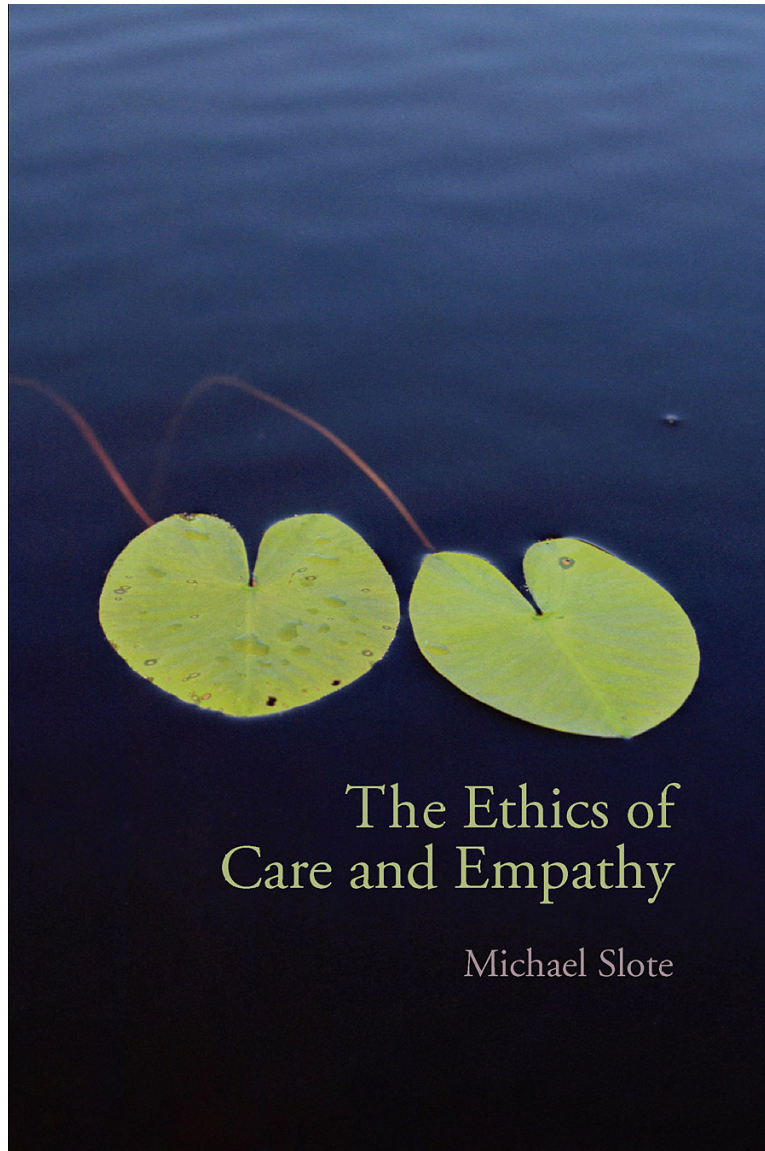


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Editorial

The fifth Special Issue of ABSTRACTA is dedicated to *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* (Routledge, 2007) by Michael Slote (University of Miami). We are proud to publish this critical discussion on such a relevant topic for ethical theory in general (embracing both normative ethics and metaethics), and whose importance extends to a range of related subjects such as moral psychology, philosophical psychology, the philosophy of action and of emotion, as well as feminism.

Taking inspiration from the sentimentalist tradition in moral philosophy and the contemporary work of care ethicists, in *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* Michael Slote takes seriously the possibility of an ethics *totally* based on the notion of care. The full-blooded care-based approach to ethics proposed in that book can be said to be distinct from other forms of care ethics in that it, firstly, makes ‘caring’ unequivocally the central notion of a theory about the content and nature of ethical judgements. But, secondly, it also puts *empathy* at the centre stage of such an ethical view. As Slote says,

Care ethicists often speak about empathy and its role in caring attitudes and relationships, but they haven’t stressed empathy to anything like the extent that I shall be doing here. I shall, for example, be making use of the recent literature of psychology to argue that empathy is the primary mechanism of caring, benevolence, compassion, etc. (*The Ethics of Care and Empathy*, p.4)

So, one of Slote’s main tasks (and challenges) in *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* is to justify and explain central ethical notions—like justice, autonomy, and rights—as well as to shed new light on old ethical questions from a broad empathy-based account of ethics. But this is not all. *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* is supposed to offer not only a coherent and significant view on ethics, but also to provide an alternative and superior approach to other traditional views such as utilitarianism and kantianism.

In the light of such an innovative, ambitious, and radical ethical project, the result of this critical discussion of Slote's work—having among its participants Annette C. Baier, John Cottingham, Julia Driver, and Nel Noddings—could not have been more stimulating.

We are thankful to all those who have taken part in this symposium for giving us the opportunity of publishing such a high-level discussion. We would like to thank, first of all, Michael Slote for his attention, time, and generous support throughout the process of editing this symposium, as well as for making it possible in the first place. We also thank the discussants who dedicated their time and effort to write their contributions, and who have made possible such an open and qualified academic debate. They are: Annette C. Baier, John Cottingham, Julia Driver and Nel Noddings. Last but not least, we are grateful to Routledge / Taylor & Francis Group for their kind and generous support.

André Abath &
Leonardo de Mello Ribeiro,
EDITORS.

October, 2010.

**PRÉCIS OF “THE ETHICS OF CARE AND EMPATHY”
(ROUTLEDGE, 2007)**

Michael Slote

Many care ethicists have held that their view represents a much needed supplement to traditional ethical thinking, but can't provide a total and systematic account of individual and political morality all on its own. But in *The Ethics of Care and Empathy*, Michael Slote argues that care ethics needs to offer such a larger picture because it is in deep ways inconsistent with traditional and, especially, with rationalist/liberal views about ethics. He argues that care ethics needs to make more use of the recent psychological literature on empathy and moral development and that it can use that literature in developing and justifying a large-scale picture of normative morality. The notion of empathy helps care ethics work out a more adequate account of moral education than has previously been available to it, but it also allows care ethics to explain such traditional rationalist notions as respect, autonomy, justice, and deontological obligation in its own distinctive and appealing terms.

COMPLEXITY IN CARING AND EMPATHY

Nel Noddings

Michael Slote's *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* is a welcome addition to the growing literature on care ethics. Possibly its two greatest contributions are 1) connecting care ethics to the earlier tradition of moral sentimentalism¹ and 2) employing *empathy* in a way that extends care ethics into justice and global affairs.² In this brief and appreciative commentary, I will concentrate on *empathy* and ways in which Slote's work may add complexity to the analysis of caring.

Empathy

Slote and I have had conversations over the past few years about the use of *empathy*. We agree that the word is relatively new—first appearing in English at around the beginning of the 20th century. It entered the language through aesthetics, and there it was held to be an act of projection—projecting oneself into a work of art in order to understand it.³

Today it is widely acknowledged that empathy involves what earlier thinkers called *sympathy*, an attitude of “feeling with” another, and etymologically, this definition of sympathy is certainly correct. In contrast, even in some current philosophical literature, *empathy* retains a heavy cognitive connotation. Karsten Stueber, for example, accepts the early definition, writing:

¹ Slote takes this project even further with his more recent *Moral Sentimentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

² Other care ethicists have contributed to the project of extending care ethics beyond the inner circle. See Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Nel Noddings, *Starting at Home: Caring and Social Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and Noddings, *The Maternal Factor: Two Paths to Morality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

³ See Susan Verducci, “A Conceptual History of Empathy and a Question it Raises for Moral Education,” *Educational Theory* 50(1): 63-80.

Empathy as understood within the original philosophical context is best seen as a form of *inner or mental imitation for the purpose of gaining knowledge of other minds*.⁴

Unlike empathy, *sympathy*, as used by David Hume, is often held to be contagious. We may feel happy in the presence of others who are happy, fearful when others show fear, sad when others are sad. There is also an element of understanding in sympathy. When we understand what another is feeling or going through, we may feel the pain or joy of the other even though we know that our feeling is not identical to that other's and that in the same situation we might feel differently. Slote prefers to name this "feeling with" *empathy*, and in that he is joined by many social scientists concerned with affect. So long as we are careful, I think we can accept this comprehensive definition of empathy.

Different Vocabularies

I cannot undertake a history of care ethics here (although it is a task that needs doing), but we need to say something about the different vocabularies that appear in work on caring. Slote connects care ethics with earlier work in philosophy (Hume, Hutcheson, Adam Smith) and with current work in psychology, especially with that of Martin Hoffman.⁵ Using recognized methods of philosophical analysis, he presents a convincing argument for the extension of care ethics into the concerns usually associated with justice and political liberalism. In contrast to others who write on care ethics, he rarely uses the words *relation*, *attachment*, *attention*, *reciprocity*, *responsibility*, *interdependence*, *mothering*, *needs*, or *motivational displacement*. This is not to say that Slote ignores these ideas, but he uses a different vocabulary to get at them, and these differences may open a whole world of further analysis for care ethicists.

Those of us who started writing on caring and care ethics in the 1980s located our work in various traditions. Carol Gilligan emphasized the "different voice" used by women in moral thinking. Virginia Held analyzed feminism in order to move toward a transformation of moral theory. I found a start in Martin Buber's relational ethics and, then,

⁴ Karsten R. Stueber, *Rediscovering Empathy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT press, 2006), p. 28.

⁵ See Martin Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

in women's experience in teaching and raising children. Sara Ruddick located the roots of caring in maternal thinking. Jean Watson started with the needs identified in nursing, and Kari Waerness pointed out the difference between caring and caregiving in social work.⁶ As we grew stronger in our conviction that women's experience had something distinctive to offer, we depended more on one another than on traditional ethical frameworks.

Now we need to explore more deeply how the concepts identified in care theory work together. Consider, for example, the idea of "inductive discipline" that Slote (following Hoffman) emphasizes in his discussion of moral education. The idea here is that an adult encourages children to consider how others feel (to empathize) and to recognize when they bear some responsibility for the pain of others. Such acts of "induction" can be powerful. But almost certainly their power depends on the relationship already established between adult and child. If the child is *attached* to the adult—loves or admires her—the induction is likely to succeed. However, if the method is used as a mere technique by an adult unknown or disliked by the child, the result may well be a sulky concern for self, not empathy. Attachment may be a foundation for the learning of empathy.

We also have to be careful to encourage children to identify the needs expressed by others. Empathy should help us to recognize the hurt feelings and pains of others even if we have had no part in causing them. Moral sensitivity is not merely a matter of not causing pain, it should lead us to relieve pain whatever its cause.

In my own work, I have put emphasis on *attention*. Following Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch, I have described receptive attention as a fundamental characteristic of caring.⁷ In *Caring*, I used the word *engrossment* to capture both the receptive attention required and the "feeling with" that accompanies such attention. Because *engrossment* was sometimes misconstrued as some sort of infatuation, I dropped the word and now use only *attention*.

⁶ See Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); Virginia Held, *Feminist Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989); Jean Watson, *Nursing: The Philosophy and Science of Caring* (Boulder: Colorado Associated University Press, 1979); and Kari Waerness, "The Rationality of Caring," *Economic and Industrial Democracy, and International Journal* 5 (2), 1984: 185-210.

⁷ See Simone Weil, *Simone Weil Reader*, ed. George A. Panichas (Mt. Kisco, NY: Moyer Bell Limited, 1977) and Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970).

But something has been lost in this change. The attention of which I speak is *receptive*; one-caring listens without the bias accompanying classroom forms of attention. A carer is truly open to the other, vulnerable to what she or he is feeling. This is not the kind of attention directed to some pre-established goal of our own. It is not the attention we direct to teachers when we are preparing for a test. I suspect that the philosophical temptation to simplify has infected both my work and Slote's. Moving from *engrossment* to *receptive attention* to *attention*, I must return to a fuller analysis of the attention that is so central to acts of caring. Similarly, I think Slote has perhaps packed too much into *empathy*.

Attention and Empathy

Although I did not use *empathy* in my earlier work, I spoke repeatedly of “feeling with” and being moved. If we use *empathy* to describe this experience, when and how does it occur? How does it connect with *attention*? In many, perhaps most, situations, we listen or observe receptively and then we feel empathy; that is, attention precedes empathy. As we listen to the other, we identify her feelings; we begin to understand what she is going through. As a result, we feel something. When what we feel is close to what the other is expressing, we may say that we are experiencing empathy. This experience leads to *motivational displacement*. We put aside our own goals and purposes temporarily in order to assist in satisfying the expressed needs of the other; our motive energy flows toward the purposes or needs of the other. This is the basic chain of events in caring.

However, it is not always this straight-forward. Sometimes what we hear from the other arouses feelings of alarm, disgust, or doubt. Our task then may be more complicated. We still feel for the other, but we may have to explain why his need cannot be satisfied; sometimes, we even have to convince him that, for the sake of others in the web of care, the need should *not* be satisfied. When we are actually repulsed by what we hear, we must ask whether we can preserve the caring relation without satisfying or even approving of the expressed need. In any case, even in moral disgust, a carer will not harm the cared-for and will try to move the relation in a healthier direction. My point in this paragraph is that what we feel as a result of our attention may not always be *empathy* as described by Slote. There is still a place for the original definition of empathy—an attempt to understand another's

mind. We do feel something as a result of the empathic experience, but we may not sympathize or “feel with” this other.

The situation might be even worse. Suppose we have several encounters with a person who has committed a harmful act—criminal assault, for example. If the person shows no remorse and suggests that the innocent victim “had it coming,” we are unlikely to “feel with” that person. However, we may retain an inactive empathic attitude, and we will not permit deliberate pain to be inflicted on the criminal. In the language I have used, we remain “prepared to care,” if the feelings expressed by the other—pain, fear, feelings of abandonment—are of the sort with which a carer can sympathize.

Slote’s discussion of the deontological elements in care ethics is very helpful on issues of this type. Because we are committed to caring as a way of life, we accept at least one absolute: never deliberately inflict pain. Caring forbids torture and other inhumane acts. We are also prepared to move from the natural caring guided by inclination to the ethical caring that instructs us to meet and treat this other “as if” natural caring were active. Again there is a deontological element in the commitment to care that pushes us to employ ethical caring when natural caring fails.

Does attention always precede empathy? Surely there are times when a dramatic hurt occurs, and we automatically feel empathy; our attention is drawn to the one hurt. Our inclination is to relieve pain, save life, solicit help. Only the order has changed. Instead of attention, empathy, motivational displacement, response, we have empathy, attention, motivational displacement, response.

There is yet another possibility in what might be called the empathic circle. With some groups—our families, people who share important beliefs with us, people “like us”—we enter encounters in an empathic mode. We are ready to respond empathically. With other groups, we are not predisposed to exercise empathy; we may even resist actively. Here, if we are committed to care, attention is of primary importance. Often we suppose it is critical thinking that is involved here and, of course, it plays a definite role. But at what point? Even before the other has spoken? If we already know (or think we know) the other’s mind, we can direct our attention to the words he uses and, analyzing them from our own perspective, confirm our initial opinions. We achieve what we take to be empathic

accuracy almost a priori. And, of course, we may be mistaken. We see this behavior repeatedly in political life.

But there is another approach to managing our attention. Iris Murdoch suggests that we might see justly or lovingly.⁸ In the language of care ethics, this means to enter or re-enter encounters prepared to care, even if we are not initially predisposed to be empathic, to attend receptively. In the example used by Murdoch—that of M, a mother-in-law who is trying to see her daughter-in-law in a better light, M takes herself to task for being perhaps “old-fashioned...conventional...prejudiced and narrow-minded.” M considers, “I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous. Let me look again.”⁹ What might this tell us about empathic accuracy? It is not simply a matter of understanding the other in some entirely objective way. From the perspective of care ethics, it is a matter of seeing the other in the best possible light. It means examining our own frame of mind and how it influences our understanding. As remarked above, we usually do this almost automatically with close friends, family, and those with whom we agree on politics or religion. In the case of others—those initially outside our empathic circle—it requires a moral effort. It requires the application of *ethical* caring.

Slote and I are both interested in the problems associated with caring for people at a distance. We both argue, but somewhat differently, that—contrary to the demands of Peter Singer and Peter Unger—distance does matter.¹⁰ Slote argues convincingly that distance matters because it affects our empathic response. I agree with this, but I also point to studies in evolutionary biology that confirm the human tendency to relate most closely and easily with those of similar genetic heritage.¹¹ I do not go to naturalistic extremes and argue that things *should* be as they *are*, but I do argue that any normative ethic that ignores “how things are” is unlikely to be taken seriously.

Because we are naturally disposed to respond empathically to those closest to us does not imply that we cannot learn to extend our empathy to strangers and distant others. If we are committed to care, we meet proximate strangers prepared to care; they address us

⁸ Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, p.23.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.17.

¹⁰ See Slote, *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), ch. 2.

¹¹ Noddings, *The Maternal Factor*.

directly, and we must respond. Singer (and others) would have us believe that the plight of a distant stranger puts exactly the same moral demand on us as that of the person right before us. (I should note that our empathy may be triggered at a distance if the object of our attention is someone already in our empathic circle—a son in the military, for example. I also argue that caring demands “completion,” some response from the cared-for, and this is often absent in attempts to care for strangers at a distance.) Slote argues (rightly, I think) that the degree or strength of empathy is different. But there is more to consider. In care ethics, we speak of motivational displacement. When we attend and receive expressions of pain or need, we feel something akin to that pain (we empathize or sympathize), and then we experience motivational displacement; we are moved to help.

It is at this stage that the process of trying to care at a distance, sadly but inevitably, often breaks down. I may feel very bad about the victims of poverty or injustice in some far away land, but when I look at the pile of repeated solicitations from charitable organizations, local services, universities, and various groups dedicated to the welfare of animals, I have to conclude that I simply cannot respond (again) to all of them. I *feel* for the suffering, but an attempt at motivational displacement is hopeless. If I were religious, I might pray. Many do consider prayer a form of doing something. I might decide to vote only for people committed to global welfare, but I’ve already done this. I do not avert my gaze. I look right at the sufferers, but I admit that I can do nothing further. If, by a stretch, I can help one more sufferer, I must neglect the second one in line. As an individual, I quickly reach a position of helplessness. And, if the process goes far enough, I may suffer empathic exhaustion. For reasons of this sort, I have advised that we separate individual and collective responsibility. We have to work from an actual world and real possibilities.¹²

I thank Michael Slote for his work on these tough issues and especially for the incentive to study more deeply the connections among the central concepts and vocabularies of care ethics.

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¹² Ibid.

EMPATHY AND ETHICS

John Cottingham

It is a great pleasure to have been invited to contribute to this symposium on Michael Slote's *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* (London/New York: Routledge, 2007). Few, I think, would disagree with him about the importance of caring and empathy in the moral life. The idea goes back at least as far as the so-called Golden Rule of Jesus of Nazareth – 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you' (Matthew 7:12) . This injunction to treat other people as we would like to be treated were we in their place suggests that the moral person is one who makes a kind of imaginative leap, visualising how they would feel were they in the other person's shoes. How far one identifies with another on any given occasion is a matter of degree, and I am actually doubtful about Slote's sharp distinction between sympathy and empathy – merely feeling sorry for someone as opposed to actually 'feeling their pain'. And I'm even more dubious about his claim that 'any adult speaker of English will recognize' that the labels 'sympathy' and 'empathy' mark this difference (p.13). But the general idea that being moved by the plight of others (what Slote calls 'empathic caring') is at the heart of the moral outlook strikes me as a fascinating one, and Slote's defence of it contains much that is illuminating, both philosophically and morally.

The more ambitious, and controversial, part of Slote's enterprise is to exhibit empathy as not just a central element in the moral outlook but as its foundation stone: he wants to develop 'a caring account of *all* morality' (p.2, emphasis supplied), one that will rival the utilitarian attempts to provide a 'first principle' of morality, and one that will subsume the deontological realm (normally regarded as an entirely different domain from anything connected with feeling or caring) and provide its own distinctive account of such notions as justice and rights.

Defenders of the monolithic welfare foundationalism of Bentham and Mill have long struggled with the problem of how far they can successfully subsume the requirements of rights and justice under their first principle, and it is no surprise that Slote's defence of

his empathetic foundationalism parallels some of those struggles. Indeed, my first main worry about his approach is that his strategy mirrors that of the utilitarians so closely that it threatens to lose its distinctive character and merge its identity into a form of utilitarianism. Thus, he argues that a ‘developed care ethics’ will try to prohibit certain kinds of free speech (e.g. Nazi-style hate speech, p.68). Why? Because, although the empathiser will feel deeply for the pain caused to the committed Nazi by being prevented from going on the hate march that is so important to his whole way of life, she will also feel deeply for the greater pain that would be caused to Holocaust survivors if the march went ahead. Although couched in terms of empathetic care, what this seems to me to come down to is a consequentialist calculation of the amount of pain caused by the alternative courses of action, and a resulting decision to sacrifice the right of free speech to the balance of utility. The empathizing may help me to *access* the pain felt by the various parties, but what is doing the work in the actual ethical decision appears to be not the ‘empathic caring’ as such, but rather the consequentialist assessment of the total quantity and quality of pain involved among the parties as a whole.

The same point arises even more strikingly in Slote’s discussion of the ‘trapped miners’ case. Initially, he seems to want to condemn someone who fails to respond to their immediate plight, preferring to invest in safety equipment that will save more lives in future; such a person ‘cannot be said to be compassionate even if he or she seeks to save more lives’ (p.27). But later this judgement is subject to crucial qualification: an ‘empathically influenced sense’ of the enormous gains obtained by installing safety equipment that would save *hundreds* might in certain cases lead us to spend money on this rather than rescuing a few trapped minors (p.45). Here, despite the inserted labelling of the future gains as being apprehended by ‘an empathic sense’, what seems to be really going on is that empathizing with the pain of those now actually trapped is swamped by a rational calculation of numbers of possible future lives saved by an alternative course of action (provided the numbers exceed a certain threshold): and this looks to me structurally much more like a consequentialist than an empathy-based framework

Slote’s attempts to give empathy-based explanations of deontic constraints, such as the prohibition against stealing, or the need to respect autonomy, appear to me problematic

for a rather different reason, namely that they fail to capture the ethical value that is at issue. If we have empathetic concern for others, Slote argues, we will ‘not want to see them lose their possessions’. True, but does this explain the wrongness of stealing from a rich person, or from a corporation, where the resulting distress may be pretty minimal? In general, Slote wants to make the moral gravity of a given piece of behaviour be a function of how ‘empathically averse’ we are to it. But feeling someone’s pain seems to be something that may vary widely depending on all sorts of contingencies; for example, I may often be much more upset at someone’s losing his property as a result of a preventable flood (e.g. that following Hurricane Katrina) than I am by his being burgled, whereas our legal system and our moral intuitions generally judge the latter to involve a graver moral wrong. In any case, the phrase ‘empathically averse’ sounds to my ear like something of a logical hybrid: I can surely be *averse* (morally) to something in a case which fails to engage my empathy, and, conversely, empathetically engaged when I do not perceive moral gravity. So I am sceptical about Slote’s (admittedly ingenious) attempts to make empathy the source, for example, of the doing/allowing distinction, as where he argues we are ‘empathically more averse’ to causing loss than to allowing it to occur as a result of natural forces that we might have prevented (p.45).

Analogous kinds of worry, as far as I can see, beset Slote’s empathetic account of the obligation to respect someone’s autonomy. Thus the kind of intolerance that would suppress the religious beliefs and practices of others is rooted (Slote argues) in a ‘failure to empathize’ with their point of view: such persecutors ‘don’t try to understand things from the standpoint of those they persecute’ (p.59). But this seems to me somehow to get the focus wrong. Suppressing others may or may not be accompanied by lack of effort to see their point of view; but what makes it *wrong* is not that lack of effort, but rather the breach of the deontic constraint to treat others with respect; conversely, to respect someone is to allow them to pursue their projects *even when you utterly fail to empathize with them*. To put it in virtue-ethics terms, it is easy to be tolerant of another when their behaviour strikes a chord in our hearts; only when, after the best of efforts, we remain repelled by or uncomprehending of their projects does the true virtue of tolerance shine forth.

There is a common thread running through these sorts of cases, which highlights a general reservation I have about the ‘sentimentalist care-ethical framework’ (as Slote terms it, p.36), namely what I take to be a gap between the psychological facts about what we may or may not feel in our dealings with others, and the moral or normative facts about how we should behave. Speaking of the appalling My Lai massacre (in the Vietnam war), Slote says that ‘we are more chilled, more horrified, by [the actions of those who gunned down children and other civilians in cold blood] than we are by the actions of those who killed children and other victims from the air and never saw their victims’ (p.25). I think he is quite right in saying that what horrifies us in the former case is that the perpetrator ‘demonstrates a greater lack of (normal or fully developed) empathy’; in other words, we just cannot see how anyone who ‘wears a human heart’ (in the Humean phrase) could bring themselves to do such a thing. Our horror is engaged by the ‘salience, conspicuousness, vividness and immediacy’ (p.23) of the machine gun massacre, and it is perfectly understandable why we should feel an outrage that may perhaps be lacking in the bombing case. But ought our moral judgement to run in tandem with these vividly evoked feelings of sympathy, horror and the like?

I certainly think such feelings are highly relevant to the domain of morality, and I would be very suspicious of those ‘cold’ ethicists who blithely sweep aside what Leonard Kass has tellingly dubbed ‘the wisdom of repugnance’. But there is clearly a difference between *explaining* our responses by reference to the repertoire of human empathetic responses, and *justifying* them. To be sure, Slote is alive to this crucial distinction, and he explicitly states that his project is not just to use empathy to explain our intuitions that certain courses of action are worse than others, but also to justify them (cf. p.23). But given that vital distinction, I’m not convinced that we can justify our initial feeling that the bomber of civilians from a great height is doing something less grave. On the contrary, I think it is clear that technological developments in warfare of the last seventy years or so have put increasing pressure on the reliability as a moral touchstone of just those intuitions that are at stake here. Because we are now capable of inflicting death and destruction from a safe distance, we have good reason, it seems to me, to deconstruct the intuition that the

missile aimer or airborne bomber manifests a less chilling disposition (from the empathic point of view) than the hand-to-hand killer.

An important underlying issue here concerns the authority or (in the jargon) ‘normativity’ of our feelings and impulses – something that has always been something of a problem for sentiment-based ethics. In one of the most interesting sections of the book, Slote tackles this issue head on. Rightly, it seems to me, he rejects the notion that normativity derives from rationality alone: there is nothing *irrational*, he says, in not caring about the welfare of others; and if there is some kind of tie between rationality and the interests of others, it is very much weaker than the immediate and intuitive tie there is between rationality and self interest (p.106). Slote also (and again I would agree with him here) rejects deflationist accounts of normativity that would reduce it to mere prescriptivity, making ought judgements simply a kind of recommendation (p.107). To preserve the genuine authority of moral claims we have to think of them, Slote suggests, as something like categorical imperatives in Kant’s sense; and what this comes down to is that we cannot escape the demands in question merely by denying we are motivated to respond to them. The upshot is that the care-ethicist needs to be able to say that it remains wrong for me to not to help my daughter even if I have no desire to help her: ‘the relevant moral judgement of obligation applies to me and makes me liable to moral criticism even if I lack the relevant desire’ (p.107).

But *can* the care ethicist say this? Technically, Slote is perhaps in the clear on this point, since his official criterion for wrongness is that ‘actions are morally wrong, and contrary to moral obligation if, and only if, they reflect or exhibit or express an absence (or lack) of fully developed empathic concern for (or caring about) others on the part of the agent’ (p.31). So the person who has no desire to help his daughter, and fails to help her, is, to be sure, acting wrongly on this criterion. Yet although this preserves the truth of the judgement ‘he was wrong not to help his daughter’, it seems to me simply to postpone answering the normativity question. Slote is (rightly I think) committed to the idea that it is wrong not to help the child even when I have no desire to help her – even when I have no empathy for her. But in that case, wrongness is not a function of the actual caring feelings or empathy felt by the agent; it is instead a function of the caring feelings and empathy that

ought to be felt, or which *would* be felt by a person with a maximally developed sense of empathy. And this now raises the further question of *why* that degree of empathy ought to be felt – what is it about maximally empathetic feelings that gives them that authority over us, even when we don't ourselves experience them?

I can think of several answers to that question. A religious answer might be 'because Christ commanded us to love and care for each other', or 'because caring for others brings us closer to God, source of all goodness'. A utilitarian answer might be 'because a society where caring and empathy are maximized is a happier, more harmonious society.' A deontological answer might be 'because the daughter you brought in to the world deserves, or is entitled to, your care.' But all these answers, of course, would dethrone empathy from the supreme position Slote wants it to occupy.

To be sure, all justification must stop somewhere, and perhaps the care ethicist could claim that empathy is the ultimate value which serves to ground other values. As I effectively conceded at the outset, I would certainly agree that it is very 'central' (a term Slote sometimes uses) to the moral life; but despite the ingenuity of Slote's arguments, the stronger, foundational, role seems to me not to be made out. Philosophers are often drawn to grand systems, and many years ago Nicolas Rescher deplored the philosophical tendency to want there to be a 'queen bee' in the ethical hive, rather than accepting a mere colony of workers. That may mean resisting the conflationist tendencies of much recent ethical theory, and accepting the need for distinct and irreducible frameworks. Indeed, even within a single framework, for example a virtue-ethics perspective, there seems reason to acknowledge a plurality of distinct ethical excellences alongside empathy, including, for example, courage, integrity, truthfulness, generosity and hope. Nevertheless, one historically dominant tradition, that of Christianity, acknowledges *agape* (love for fellow human beings) as the 'greatest' of the virtues, and in its operation this clearly has close affinities with empathetic caring, as expounded by Slote. So anyone whose ethical thinking is influenced by the Christian tradition (as is that of all Westerners to a large extent, consciously or subconsciously, and whether or not they are believers) should be interested in the project of exploring the centrality of empathy in the moral life. Whether or not Slote

has succeeded in developing a caring account of all of morality, his careful and wide-ranging explorations provide rich food for thought.

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**CARING AND EMPATHY:
ON MICHAEL SLOTE’S SENTIMENTALIST ETHICS**

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Michael Slote has done a great deal to revive interest in sentimentalism. For Slote the focus of positive moral evaluation is the agent’s motive, that of caring for others, which can particularly involve empathy, or sympathy. However, there are challenges to this approach that Slote has not dealt with sufficiently. A major challenge comes from writers who hold that some empathy deficit disorders are completely compatible with moral agency. For example, persons with autism can perform morally praiseworthy or blameworthy actions even though they possess an empathy deficit disorder. Slote is aware of this challenge, and briefly responds to it, but I believe that sentimentalism has the resources to provide a more broadly satisfactory response to this challenge than the one Slote provides, and this will be the focus of the essay.

The Challenge

Jeanette Kennett argues that an empathy deficit cannot explain the moral failings of the psychopath, since autistics also suffer from an empathy deficit. Autistics possess a moral concern for others and a sense of duty, psychopaths do not. On her view then, against the Humean view of moral agency, empathy is not required. One need not be able to put oneself in the shoes of another in order to engage in moral agency, to act morally. This lends support, she believes, to the Kantian view of moral agency in which agents are those who reason from rules; they conform their behavior to rules of a certain character. Further, autistic persons “...though lacking empathy, do seem capable of deep moral concerns. They are capable, as psychopaths are not, of the subjective realization that other people’s interests are reason-giving in the same way as one’s own, though they may have great

difficulty in discerning what those interests are.”¹ The empathy is significant, but only as a means of gathering evidence about what those interests are. Others working in this area disagree, as I do, about the significance of this difference. For example, Victoria McGeer argues that autistics may lack empathy, but they have other affective states that ground moral agency, such as a strong desire for order that underlies their concern with rule-following. She also speculates that there are different spheres of concern that we see working in the moral psychology of autistics are lacking in psychopaths: compassion for others; concern with one’s place in the social order; and concern with one’s ‘cosmic’ place, and cosmic level order.

This challenge has been expanded upon by writers such as Frédérique de Vignemont and Uta Frith who formulate the following paradox:²

- a. Humean view: Empathy is the only source of morality.
- b. People who have no empathy should have no morality.
- c. People with autism show a lack of empathy.
- d. People with autism show a sense of morality.

As they note, Kennett tries to resolve the paradox by rejecting the Humean view, **a.**, in the paradox. McGeer opts for holding that empathy as the only source for morality is wrong, but that the Humean account of agency is not committed to this. Thus, as de Vignemont and Frith note, she is basically rejecting **a.** and **b.** in her response to the challenge Kennett poses. I agree with this general strategy, though a good deal hangs on what is meant by ‘empathy’ and what is meant by moral agency. Moral agency is actually fragmented amongst different capacities.

Slote, however, dismisses Kennett’s challenge with the following response:

Some autistic people may...be capable of empathy even if they lack the ability to respond to certain social cues....many autistic people demonstrate a remarkable

¹ Jeanette Kennett (2002) ‘Autism, Empathy, and Moral Agency’, *Philosophical Quarterly* 52: 340–57.

² Frédérique de Vignemont & Uta Frith (2007) ‘Autism, Morality and Empathy’, In W. Sinnott-Armstrong (ed.) *Moral Psychology, volume 3: The Neuroscience of Morality*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 273-280.

affinity for and emotional connection with animals...Finally, the examples that Kennett uses to illustrate the moral capacities of people with Asperger's syndrome make the responses of such people seem (to me) based more on the desire to fit in with or please those around them, than on what most of us think of as genuinely moral motivation. (2007: 126-7)

The basic strategy is to claim that either they do have (first-order) empathy, and are thus moral agents, or they lack it, but then also lack what we would describe as *true* moral motivation. Referring to the claims above, he rejects either **c.** or **d.** depending on what are taken to be the true facts regarding autistics.

But the Humean view can be addressed differently, I believe, and in a way that still keeps to the spirit of the sentimentalist approach which seems to rely so heavily on empathy. Empathy, as Slote understands it, is only a very small part of the sentimentalist picture of moral agency.

First of all, what does Slote mean by 'empathy'? Certainly, in the psychology literature, the term is used to pick out a variety of different psychological states. Slote deals with this issue early in the book, appropriately, in which he provides a sophisticated and very informative account that ties the psychology literature to the sentimentalist tradition in the history of philosophy. Basically, we need to note a distinction between empathy and sympathy. He captures this with the example of Bill Clinton: there's a difference between "...feeling someone's pain and feeling *for* someone who is in pain." (2007: 13) He continues:

Thus empathy involves having the feelings of another (involuntarily) aroused in ourselves, as when we see another person in pain. It is as if their pain invades us, and Hume speaks, in this connection, of the contagion between what one person feels and what another comes to feel. However, we can also feel sorry for, bad for, the person who is in pain and positively wish them well. This amounts, as we say, to sympathy for them, and it can happen even if we aren't feeling their pain. (2007: 13)

Interestingly, Slote avoids the issue of animals and empathy, since he views that as peripheral to his account, but Hume discusses animals and empathy quite prominently in his writings on empathy.

Be that as it may, not enough distinctions are made here. Some people refer to

empathy as simply involving the ability to put oneself in someone else's position. This may or may not involve feeling what that person feels. For example, on this understanding of empathy, one can exercise it even absent any particular feelings. A psychopath is capable of this kind of empathy—and, indeed, successful ones will be skilled at it—since deception requires being able to put oneself into someone else's shoes to try to see what *that* person would find plausible and convincing. I'll term this empathy (1). This is an important skill in successful manipulation of others, though it is also a crucial skill in the successful comforting of others—one needs to be able to put oneself in another's shoes to understand what that person finds comforting. Understood this way, empathy is important when it comes to gathering information about others that we need for practical deliberation. This is obviously not what Slote has in mind. For him, empathy involves having, via some kind of contagion, the emotions of others. I'll term this empathy (2). I don't think this kind of caring is necessary for moral agency, even on a Humean sentimentalist picture of morality. This is why autistics, though they don't seem to 'catch' the emotions of others, can still be moral agents. They still *care*. They care about the suffering of others, the happiness of others, and so forth, even if they have difficulty acquiring information that would help them act effectively to promote the interests of those they do care about. In this way, empathy deficits do not result in lack of moral agency.

However, some people mean by empathy something like sympathy, where one feels for another being. This is like Slote's use of 'sympathy'. Slote seems to hold the view that as our empathic capacities develop along with our cognitive capacities, we can empathize with others even when they lack the feelings we think somehow 'appropriate'. His example is feeling sad for someone who has terminal cancer but who is not aware of it. That person is not sad, but the empathizer knows the person would be sad if he or she knew about the terminal illness. (2007: 15)

Still, it seems that what is being run together is empathy as an emotional contagion and empathy as feeling a certain way (either sad, happy, etc.) when we think that emotion would be appropriate for the object of our empathy. These are not the same thing. It may be, as Slote intimates, that causally we need to go through the first stage developmentally, but that is just a contingent feature of human emotional development. Further, the

emotional contagion view alluded to by Slote is incomplete. It surely needs correction. Consider the example of a triage physician. He absolutely needs to tamp down his empathic responses in order to function well. Otherwise, he would be overwhelmed with sadness and despair. For him, in those circumstances, feeling what his patients are feeling is just too much. And there are many cases like this. It may be that the empathy (2) is useful, again, for giving us information but that it needs to be supplemented by something else—either cognitive considerations to the effect that, if we let the emotions run rampant we will be practically inefficacious, or perhaps there is an emotional dampener that comes into play when emotions risk overwhelming the agent. Whatever the story is, and maybe both are correct, for that matter, some corrective is appropriate.

At this point we have four distinctive notions at play: empathy (1), empathy (2), feeling the emotion we think appropriate for the object of empathy, and sympathy. But what is key for sentimentalism is that agent's care about the good, as opposed to simply recognize the rational demands recognition of the good places upon them. Of course, this runs against Slote's account, where it isn't just caring but *empathic* caring that is crucial to morality, where empathic caring is understood as the involuntary adoption of the emotions of others.

The view that I think is more plausible—given its ability to accommodate the views we have of moral agency given certain deficits—is that caring about doing the right thing is important to morality, and sufficient as the 'caring condition', even if the agent has no close relationships with specific other individuals. Further, it isn't just first-order caring that comes into the picture. I also believe, following Hume, that meta-cognition, broadly construed, is crucial to moral agency (though not to moral standing). Meta-cognition allows even more scope for reason's modulation of our emotional responses.

Caring about Caring

An important feature of agency is meta-cognition. Human beings, and quite likely some animals, possess the capacity to regulate cognition through higher-level cognition. However, animals and human beings differ in terms of the types of meta-cognition they engage in. Humans have the capacity to endorse or fail to endorse their own mental states.

Hume believed that this was a crucial difference between human beings and animals. Animals experience sympathy to some extent, but they aren't able to reflect on the sympathy that they feel and then either endorse it or recognize that it needs modulation.

This is crucial to the actual practice of morality in that it is commonly recognized amongst sentimentalists that our emotional reactions, even our *caring* emotional reactions, frequently require correction. Reason plays a prominent role here.

Smith and Hume both proposed idealizing procedures as a way of making the correction. Evidence of what is the case, facts, and so forth are quite relevant to this in as much as those facts influence how one feels. Slote notes that it is a part of good character to try to get relevant information:

A mother who cares about her child wants to know how to do what is good for her child, and this involves knowing and initially learning all sorts of nutritional and medical facts....In deciding what to do, say, for a child, a parent needs a substantial degree of epistemic rationality... (2007: 120)

Slote argues that theoretical reason is crucial to moral behavior. However, he retains what he views as the classical sentimentalist skepticism about practical reason. We need to be very clear about what this skepticism involves. When Christine Korsgaard, for example, talks about skepticism regarding practical reason she focuses primarily on the issue of motive skepticism, which is the idea that reason cannot *by itself* be a motive for action.³ It is true that the classical sentimentalists are committed to such a view. However, as Slote himself notes, they are not committed to ignoring reason's role in practical deliberation in other ways. So if we limit our account of practical reason in such a way as to exclude reason as itself a motive, we are open to have a wide variety of accounts of practical reason. It would just be some account of how we figure out what we are supposed to *do*, as opposed to what it is we are supposed to believe. Of course, a sentimentalist can give an account of this.

The Sentimentalist is offering a slightly more complicated view of practical

³ Christine Korsgaard (1996) 'Skepticism about Practical Reason', in her *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.311-334; originally published in *The Journal of Philosophy* 83: 5-25, 1986.

deliberation in morality than the rationalist. It is not that reason plays no role in practical deliberation at all, it is not that reason has no role, even, in regulating our non-basic desires. It is simply that reason is not the source of our basic desires, whatever they may be. We can call this the *Sentimentalist motivational thesis* (SMT), and this is primarily the claim that Slote focuses on defending. Because our desires are affected by our cognitive states—what we believe and what we know—reason plays a role in regulating them. This is true in morality as well as aesthetics. My desire to help someone with their groceries depends on my belief that they haven't stolen the groceries. My desire to see a film will depend on my believing that it is aesthetically pleasing.

But there is also meta-cognitive regulation of our emotional states as well as our beliefs. Even when we have all the facts straight we may fail to endorse an emotional response. We may, for example, feel that we are being biased in favor of the near and dear, or prejudiced against someone who we don't know very well. Or we may view our emotional response as out of proportion in some way. All of this is perfectly compatible with SMT, and yet it offers a more complex view of how our emotions are regulated either by beliefs about those emotions or higher-order feelings.

On Hume's view human beings possessed the capacity to reflect on and endorse our moral sentiments. It was this capacity that distinguished humans from animals for Hume in terms of moral agency and judgment. Animals could possess lesser forms of virtue on his view, but because they couldn't reflect on their sympathetic responses they were unable to exercise the sort of authority over their actions needed for agency. They cared about others, there was ample evidence of that, but no evidence that we know of that they had any normative attitude towards the caring itself.

Crucially, they cannot take the idealized perspective required for moral judgment. For Hume, the corrective viewpoint is 'the general point of view'. This is the correct place from which to make judgments of virtue, but it also just is the standard for virtue itself. On the issue of just making a *judgment* of virtue, or moral goodness, or rightness the Humean would hold that the individuals initial reaction needs to be viewed from an idealized perspective that is independent of the individual's biases and prejudices, as much as possible. One might further add the consideration (implicit in Hume, I believe), that one

have as much information as possible about effects (and Slote agrees information is important), but also that one consider how one feels about one's reaction and then try to diagnose that feeling if it seems off. This would be part of the reflective endorsement required to ground our normative commitments.

How does all this relate to the initial problem regarding empathy deficit disorders such as autism? The autistic person cares about caring in the appropriate way. The autistic person has the right sort of meta-cognitive states, yet has trouble acquiring the information necessary to figuring out what individuals are actually interested in. We might properly regard it as partly an attentional deficit. It is interesting because the 'executive' meta-cognitive level is in play, but has little to get a grip on. This is perhaps what causes the well known anxiety experienced by autistics who are put in a position where they are required to act, particularly in novel situations where new information needs to be acquired and processed.

Thus, persons with autism are capable of moral judgment, they have the caring that is required for moral agency, though they may lack exactly the sort of empathic skills Slote insists on. However, this isn't a problem for sentimentalism *per se* at all. The sentimentalist simply holds that the basis for normative commitment is desire.

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IS EMPATHY ALL WE NEED?

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Michael Slote's *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* (ECE), Routledge, 2007, and *Moral Sentimentalism* (MS), Oxford University Press, 2010, present two stages in a very ambitious plan, to give an account of both normative morality and metaethics in the same sentimentalist terms, in particular in terms of empathy. ECE is concerned more with normative ethics, and the metaethical views it expresses are tentative. But, of MS, which in its normative ethics repeats much from ECE, Slote writes, "This book attempts to deal with metaethical and normative issues in the same sentimentalist terms, and I believe offers a more thoroughgoing, a more systematic defense of moral sentimentalism than anything that has appeared since Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*." (MS: i) Proud words. Hume's own attempt to do better, his *Enquiry into the Principles of Morals*, is largely ignored, since sympathy in the sense of empathy plays a lesser role there than in the earlier work, and the main sentiment playing a part in its metaethics is not sympathy, but the broader-ranging "sentiment of humanity". Slote tries to convince the reader that our fundamental moral capacity is empathy, and that degree of wrongness of action is determined in part (ECE) or altogether (MS) by degree of lack of empathy or normal sharing of others' feelings, a lack that produces a "chill" when we attempt to empathize with those who show it in their actions. "Distinctions of empathy broadly mark or correspond to plausible moral distinctions, and....empathy is crucial to moral motivation." (ECE: 125) In MS the claim is not just that plausible moral distinctions correspond with degree of empathy, but that the meaning of "right" and "wrong" can be given in terms of higher-level empathy (MS: 68). Empathy felt by agents is taken to motivate action to help others, and knowing what is the right thing to do is knowing what the person with proper empathy, that is empathy we can empathize with, would do. Slote is very proud of his "semi-Kripkean" account of how we fix the reference of moral terms, and tells us it has taken him five years to get it into the form it has in MS. I shall return later to its plausibility.

Slote sees his view as falling into the sentimentalist tradition in ethics (hence the second book's title), in particular as developing Hume's *Treatise* views about a sympathy-grounded morality, and in particular, for the account of moral judgment, Hume's words about how we warm to the warm-hearted person. MS is dedicated to Hume. Slote is also developing and amending the more recent feminist tradition of an ethics of care, where the emphasis on *empathic* care constitutes the amendment. He also mentions the Christian ethics of love or *agape* as a forerunner to his views. While agreeing with the early Gilligan that this way of conceiving of morality may be more natural to women than to men, he cites Jesus of Nazareth as well as Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume and Smith, in addition to recent women such as Carol Gilligan, Nel Noddings, Virginia Held, Marilyn Friedman and myself, as those whose views he is developing (ECE: 3). But he claims he is the first (after Jesus?) to claim not just that concern for others is *part* of morality, but that, when taken to be based on empathy, it encompasses all of it. "A care-ethical approach makes sense across the whole range of normative and political issues that philosophers have sought to deal with." (ECE: 1) And not just makes sense of them, but, if Slote is right, makes better sense of them than can the Kantian rationalist, or those who favor a mixed approach, or even Hume himself. An ethics of empathy and care not merely supplements but, Slote thinks, should replace one of rights and justice. Slote shows how his approach would deal with some abortion issues, obligations to distant others, some deontological distinctions, the value of autonomy, objections to paternalism, and social justice. He also discusses practical reason, taken as a servant to sentiment and empathy-grounded fellow-feeling, the nature of moral approval (in MS), and (MS: Chapter 10) empathy in epistemology and science.

What exactly does Slote mean by empathy? He cites studies by C.D. Batson and Martin Hoffman about empathy in children, and Batson concentrated on their responses to the *suffering* of others. In ECE the relevant empathy seemed limited to our sharing of others' distress, including their greater distress at having caused, rather than merely allowed, harm to befall another. But in MS empathy includes sharing of joys as well as hurts, so is more like Hume's "sympathy", which leads us to rejoice with another as well as share her distress. Hume thought we could also come to share others' beliefs by sympathy. Slote, dropping the "pathos" in empathy, extends the notion to sharing not only others'

passions, but their motives to action, so empathy with agents becomes important to his account of approval. Adam Smith objected to the wide range of Humean sympathy with feelings, and thought we sympathize only with feelings we judge to have moral propriety, so moral judgment must precede sympathy, and cannot be dependent on it. (Slote says of him that he is no true sentimentalist.) Does Slote think we can in principle empathize with any human feeling, the rapist's lust as well as his victim's pain and outrage, the pornography-consumer's pleasure as well as the outrage of the feminist at this demeaning portrayal of women, the killer's blood-lust as well as his victim's terror, the slave owner's or patriarch's glory in power as well as their subjects' humiliation? If we can, then empathy does not reliably track approval. It is not just empathy, but empathy with agents' empathy, which Slote appeals to in his account of approval. He links not merely the warmth felt by the approver with the warm-hearted action she approves, but also the chill, felt by the disapprover, with the coldness of heart of the disapproved-of agent, as if the latter is almost an empathy with, a contagion from, the cold-hearted man's lack of empathy. Some killers, however, have hot, not cold, feelings as they kill, and the rapist and pornography-fancier will have warm rather than cold feelings. Hume thought all feelings either pleasant or unpleasant, and to feel with another who feels fear will be decidedly unpleasant, so "cold" rather than "warm". To approve of someone who feels with the quaking fearful one, and tries to calm her, seems to be to be "warmed" by what is a negative, unpleasant, shared cold feeling. Smith, unlike Hume, thought we are always pleased when we can sympathize with another, pleased in part at the propriety of the original feeling, necessary for our sympathy. Slote speaks of the "discordance" felt by the empathic person at another's lack of empathy, but the discordance appears also to be there when we warmly approve of the empathic person's sharing of another's cold dread.

Surprisingly little attention is given by Slote, even when discussing abortion, to the possibility of contradictory sympathies, to our need to balance our sympathies, to weigh our understanding of the poor mother's reluctance to bear a child she cannot properly care for with our empathy for the vulnerable fetus in her womb. Presumably he does think that our sympathy with the meat-eater's pleasure in his steak is greater than our sympathy with the terror of the steer in the slaughter sheds, since he fails to say that vegetarianism is an

obvious implication of the ethics of empathy. Nor does he make clear if it is only present people we can empathize with. We seem to be able to empathize with characters in a novel, and imaginatively to relive past persons' experiences, when we know of them. But if we believe, as I do, that we owe something to past persons, as well as to future persons, is that because we can empathize with past persons' hopes and struggles, and foresee those of future people? The latter are not yet determinate in nature, so it is unclear we can share their experience, but we certainly can have a concern for them, even if we cannot empathize with them in the way we can with our living children and grandchildren. Slote notes that we speak of caring about ideals like freedom, but says (ECE: 19) that is not the sort of caring he is speaking about. He is concerned only with empathic caring. (ECE: 16) Hume in the *Treatise* tried to extend the notion of sympathy from a response to sentient beings to responses to abstractions such as the public interest, but came to see the dubiousness of the notion of sympathy with the public interest, so replaced it, in his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, with talk of our appreciation of social utility. We do care about social utility and the public interest, but cannot empathize with them, since they are not sentient things. If we really tried to empathize with all past and present suffering, we would lose our minds. Even those who deeply love a suffering person may find they must steel themselves against empathy with that person's extreme suffering, to be able to care for them. Care can lead us to dampen empathy. Wisely has nature ordained that it is only a few present persons with whom we let ourselves feel, though we can imagine what selected past people felt, and so can respond (futilely) to their distress, and to their character. Hume said we will feel more warmly about our faithful servant than about Marcus Brutus, but can correct our sentiments, or at least our language, so not necessarily judge her more virtuous. Our empathy with our servant can lead to action towards her, while we can do little for Brutus or Caesar, except praise or condemn them. Slote says too little about necessary limits to the range of our empathy, but seems to assume that, however extensive, it is with selected present actual people, not with past or future people. But if our obligations extend to past and future people, then they can not be reduced to our empathy with them, or to empathy with that empathy.

The first little book had a broad sweep, but Slote allowed there that some normative topics, such as our treatment of animals, had not been dealt with, and he says he hopes one day to turn to them. He also expressed dissatisfaction with how he had there dealt with metaethical issues.(ECE: 127) In the second book, it is metaethical issues, rather than normative ones, which get more extended treatment, in particular in forging a meaning link between moral terms and empathic response. On normative issues, MS mainly repeats what ECE had said. Another normative topic Slote should be planning to address is the morality of punishment, where, on the face of it, empathy might prevent rather than encourage us to incarcerate offenders, especially of those guilty of victimless crimes such as counterfeiting, where no empathy with victims counterbalances any with offenders, in the way that empathy with a fetus might counteract empathy with its reluctant mother. Although Slote claims empathy can explain our sense of justice, it is social justice he looks at, not criminal justice. The tender hearted may protest at what is meted out by the just judge, and as Hume pointed out, women tend to feel for those on their way to the scaffold. Hume did not admire this form of sentimentality, but Slote may, as he thinks women's greater capacity for empathy may make them morally superior to men, whose testosterone levels may make them aggressive rather than compassionate. (ECE: 73) He has a chapter in ECE on deontology, but does not address what role empathy has in determining how rule-breakers should be dealt with, nor even in determining what the rules should be. Indeed his understanding of deontology is peculiar: he looks in ECE not at the content of our rights and obligations, but at what wrongs we treat as worse than others, and (to my mind implausibly) thinks empathy, this time with agents rather than with patients, can explain why we think killing is worse than letting die, and more plausibly, why third trimester abortions are worse than first trimester ones, since it is easier for us to empathize with a developed fetus than with a "salamander-like" embryo, (salamanders cannot expect much from Slote when he does look at the ethics of our treatment of animals), and why breaking a promise to help is worse than failure to offer help. So although his initial claims in ECE sounded very ambitious, it turns out that he may not really be claiming there that empathy explains the *content* of morality, but rather that it can explain why, given that something such as causing death is seen as wrong, some cases of it are seen as worse than others. Or,

to be more accurate, in ECE he wavers on this matter. He is willing, in ECE Chapter 2, to “offer a criterion of right and wrong action based on the notion of empathetic caring for others,” namely “actions are wrong and contrary to moral obligation if, and only if they reflect or exhibit an absence of fully developed empathetic concern (or caring about) others on the part of the agent.” (ECE: 31) But, in his conclusion to ECE (127), he writes that he has, at that point, no idea how to define moral words in terms of empathy and that he is not happy with his earlier attempts at this. (ECE: 129, note 5) His reference there is to his “earlier published writings”, but his earlier chapters in ECE seemed to offer just such a criterion. So it remained unclear whether he believed, in ECE, that wrongness can be defined as lack of due empathy, or whether his was the weaker thesis, suggested in his treatment of deontology, that once we already know what is wrong, relative degrees of wrongness can be explained by relative lack of empathy. Then lack of empathy would be an aggravating factor, not the essence of wrongness. And, as he does not say, it is possible that empathy itself may sometimes be an excusing factor, if, say a tenderhearted jailor lets a prisoner escape. But in MS the strong thesis is again asserted, this time with more confident attention to the meaning we give to the key terms, “right” and “wrong”. “Moral goodness (or rightness) is whatever feelings of warmth directed at agents and delivered by mechanisms of empathy are caused by.” (MS: 61) This does claim not just that degree of wrongness, but wrongness itself, is what produces what he calls a “chill” (MS: 37), by the lack of normal empathy that a wrongful action shows. We are indeed chilled at the ruthless killer, but if the death he inflicts is painless, and unanticipated by the victim, it is scarcely empathy with the main victim which explains our chill. The dead are beyond feeling, so beyond our empathy. And we are also chilled by the heat of the one who delights, and takes erotic pleasure, in his act of killing. Should we be warmed by it, as some who watch pornographic films clearly are, that seems to make the displayed actions, by Slote’s criterion, right. “Warmth” is shared by too many feelings, in addition to approbation, to be adequate for Slote’s semantic purposes. Empathy enables the pornography-enjoyer’s warm pleasure, as well as its condemner’s chill, or his heated indignation. Warmth is too varied, and empathy is too flexible, for Slote’s purposes. Is it the fact that *most* of us do not empathize with the killer, or the rapist, which makes murder and rape wrong? But some do

empathize with them, or pornography would not flourish. Gilligan's empathic young women empathized with Heinz who steals the medicine for his children, when he cannot afford to pay for it, and some may empathize with the nurse, who without being begged to do so by the patient, from empathy administers euthanasia to a patient whose quality of life is very low. Our convictions about our rights, or about what we see as right, do not seem to me to have been shown by Slote to be reducible to our empathy, including our meta-empathy with empathic agents.

There are several ways in which empathy might be relevant to morality. One is that which Hume thought it had, that without some degree of it we would not be able to make moral judgments about those around us, then extend them to people we know about, including past people. He did not think empathy was sufficient for this purpose, nor did he think that it was necessary or sufficient for altruistic action. Another possible thesis about empathy is that it is the fundamental moral virtue, and so our moral judgments of each other reduce to estimates of our individual displays of empathy. Slote seems to accept this latter view, not just in MS, but in his discussion, in ECE, of whether women are morally superior to men, if they are more prone to empathy. But if this feminine feature makes women ill-equipped to be just judges, then they would not be morally superior. (The virtuous Cato, Hume says, was a "scourge to the wicked.") Even supposing it were plausible to think that hard heartedness were the only vice, in order to make moral judgments we still would need to have a dependable way of telling how soft or hard hearted another person is. Do we? Slote thinks beneficent action indicates empathy, but as Hume pointed out, one might feel with a person while not lifting a finger to help him, and some who do help may do so from a knowledge of the other's need which does not depend on empathy. If, as Hutcheson thought, altruism is the main virtue, then the empathy which can produce it would become central. But if Hume is right that justice and many other virtues are not forms of benevolence, then other features of our nature become important, and for justice in particular, our sense that, if we benefit from some particular scheme of cooperation, we should do what is expected of us by our fellow-cooperators. A third way empathy could be relevant to morality is if a higher-level form of it, empathy with empathy,

is crucial to our moral judgments. MS argues at length (Chapters 2 through 6) for such a view.

Slote sees himself alone among the “neo-sentimentalists” in using the same sentiments, empathy-derived ones, to explain both the meaning of moral terms and what their extension is. Like Hume, he offers both a meta-ethical theory and a normative one. But Hume saw felt disapprobation as directed not only at coldness and cruelty, but at stupidity and many other faults which were not faults of the heart. So Slote does, as he says, outdo Hume in his attempt to unify his meta-ethics with his normative ethics, under one umbrella, empathy. Hume remarks, of the egoist attempts to reduce all motivation to self-interest, that a false desire for simplicity drives such theorists, and that there is more real simplicity in accepting the apparent variety of human motives as real, than in straining to show them all as forms of one of them. He certainly did not think that the only thing the moral sentiment approves is itself, so did not unify his metaethics with his normative ethics in the way Slote attempts.

Slote says (MS: 1) that the choice of his title, *Moral Sentimentalism*, was a serious business. Empathy, however, is not a sentiment, but a spread of any sentiment from one person to another, so I am not so sure that Slote chose his later book’s title carefully enough. “The Ethics of Empathy” or “The Ethics of Communicated Sentiment”, would have been more accurate titles, and to that extent ECE is better-named than MS. It is also more modest, and less concerned with the ambitious and to my mind unpersuasive attempt to give the semantics of moral terms in terms of empathy, so that claims such as that cruelty is wrong come out necessarily true. As Hume pointed out, our moral vocabulary is designed for praise and blame, so the Scythian scalper would not describe his actions as cruel, but as brave and skilled. “Thick” moral terms, such as “cruel”, are emotive as well as descriptive terms, implying approval or disapproval. Hume reminds us of how we describe enemy generals as bloody-minded and perfidious, while our own commander is a model of virtue. “His treachery we call policy: His cruelty is an evil inseparable from war.” (T: 348)

Had Slote referred to empathy in his latest book’s title, could he still have dedicated it to Hume? Hume was certainly a sentimentalist in ethics. But he did not think sympathy a sentiment, nor that the sympathy-dependent sentiment which is needed to discern virtue

was itself the only virtue, so, for him, no one psychological phenomenon plays the role Slote has given to empathy. Slote, like Hutcheson, tries to reduce all virtue to benevolence, and not just benevolence but empathy-grounded or bleeding heart benevolence. St Theresa of Avila would have been a suitable dedicatee, for Slote's version of morality is the Christian one, that the only commandment is to love one's neighbor as oneself, to bear one another's burdens, even though each still bears her own burden, so burdens get multiplied by the sharing. (Actually Slote goes beyond Christianity, since he thinks there is no obligation to care for oneself, but that our duties are self/other asymmetric.) Hume rejected this Christian version of morals, since he thought many virtues, justice included, let alone the natural abilities, and those that make a person "great" rather than "good", do not reduce to benevolence, that some forms of benevolence do as much harm as good, and that there are many virtues which show in proper self-concern, rather than concern for others. But since our sympathies are strongest for those closest to us, he did not think sympathy enough to determine rightness, since it is biased in a way that true morality is not. Nor was he as confident as Slote is that feeling with others reliably leads to benevolent action. Empathy is neither necessary nor sufficient for beneficence, if Hume is right, and beneficence is only one virtue, among the 67 he named. Others are due pride, equity, good sense, serenity, endurance, wisdom and courage, which seem to have little to do with empathy, and he includes a large class of virtues, like serenity, agreeable to oneself, or, like caution and prudence, useful to self, as well as all the virtues agreeable and useful to others. (Many virtues, of course, like wisdom, patience and enterprise, serve both self and others.)

Hume thought our fundamental moral capacity, as far as judging what is virtuous is concerned, was not our partial sympathy, but rather its correction from a "general point of view," giving rise to our capacity to take a special pleasure in character traits which are welcome to all, because they benefit "the party of humankind", and so are approved by "the sentiment of humanity". Compassion is only one such virtue, whereas Slote makes it the central one. As for moral motivation, Hume appeals not merely to our concern for others, but also to such things as our pride, our gratitude, our concern for reputation, and to our sense of a common interest with others. For this last, empathy is not needed, merely discernment of interest.

Among the virtues are what Hume called the artificial virtues, which consist in obedience to rules telling us what our and others' rights are, rules adopted from a sense of common interest. There he raised his famous puzzle about what the virtuous motive is in a person who repays a loan to a "seditious bigot". Empathy would likely be with the borrower, not the loaner, in this case, yet justice demands that loans be repaid. Slote writes dismissively of Hume's concept of social artifice, and implausibly thinks empathy can explain what is wrong with theft. (ECE: 54, note 14) Gilligan's young women were willing to steal the medicine their children needed, so their empathy did not prevent stealing. Hume's account tells us what *counts* as theft, as well as what is wrong with it, since that theft is *prima facie* wrong is a necessary truth. Property rights, and promissory rights, Hume claims, have to be invented before they can be respected, and the former differ from society to society. Slote sees Hume to be neglecting "a central deontological issue", that between doing harm and allowing harm. But because of his own fixation on this distinction, which our ordinary moral thinking accepts, and his optimistic view that empathy with agents can explain it, he himself never really addresses the question of which harms are wrongs, violation of rights, so why killing and stealing are wrongings. Killing may not hurt its main victim, nor theft from a rich man much harm him, and not all hurtings are wrong. I may be hurt and even harmed by my love for a certain person not being returned, but my non-lover has not wronged me. If there is a right to be loved, it is only infants who possess it. The ethics of care will encourage us to show some sort of concern for all those around us, but cannot easily show which hurtings and harmings are wrongings. We at present are considering which of our environment-harming activities should be taken as wrongings, and in so doing, are proposing a new social artifice, something we all should contribute to, for the sake of humanity, and not just for those, such as our grandchildren and their friends, whom we know and can empathize with. Slote, without acknowledging it, takes over quite a lot from the ethics of justice, which does tell us which harmings are wrongings. Slote has not shown how appeal to empathy can either explain our duties to past and future persons, or generate a theory of rights, and so of obligations.

One of Slote's earlier books, *Morals from Motives*, agreed with Hume that it is always some inner state leading to an action which is where moral virtue is to be found, and

also agreed with him that, with benevolent actions, this will be found in their motive. But now he places the virtue not in the will or motive, but in the fellow feeling which he thinks reliably leads to benevolent motivation. (If this tie with benevolence is essential, then it alone will rule out empathy with past persons, beyond the reach of our benevolence or malice.) He allows that sometimes we do things for others from a concern for them that does not necessarily stem from sharing their distress, merely from knowing of it. Good nurses alleviate their patients' distress, if they can, but might well be incapacitated if they really felt what their patients are feeling. When Slote contrasts empathy with sympathy, he notes that the latter often does lead to altruistic action, so it is unclear to me why it is empathy, rather than considerateness, a more general concern for others, which he thinks is so important. But he is explicit that he wishes to "go beyond mere caring to the idea of empathic caring". (ECE: 16) Hume thought what he called sympathy, which does include empathy, to be a fact about our nature, and one on which our moral sense depends, but he saw empathy as just one virtue, one relevant to moral "goodness", rather than to, for example, the "greatness" of the wise legislator, or the wit of the welcome companion. One can, he says, be "too good", too tenderhearted. Hume did not see sympathy as limited to sharing the *distress* of others, since he thought good cheer just as naturally contagious as misery, and thought sharing others' admiration and joy as well as their resentment and sorrow helped us appreciate the effect of particular character traits, such as cheerfulness and moroseness, on persons affected by those with these traits, and on them themselves. In MS Slote does extend the scope of empathy to joys as well as sorrows, and in particular to an agent's feeling about what she is doing, but he does not tell us how promiscuous our empathy should be, whether the sadist's and the rapist's pleasure should be shared, and then taken into account in our moral judgments. If we do take them into account, it seems to make their actions worse, not better, so being aware of another's feelings affects our moral judgments in several ways.

Although he presents himself as what might be termed a bleeding heart liberal, in favor of progressive taxation, there is a certain inbuilt conservatism in Slote's appeal to preexistent moral intuitions about what are the greater wrongs. He tries to map the meaning he is proposing for moral terms like "right", in terms of degree of empathy at the agent's

degree of empathy, against the extension of the term that ordinary people in our society give it. Is this what meta-ethics always does? Ordinary Scythians approved of large scalp collections, so, if Slote is right, must have empathized only with other Scythians, not, or much less, with those whom they scalped. Facts about empathy are not fixed, otherwise women's emancipation, and the emancipation of other slaves, would not have taken so long. Empathy is a poor basis for a reflective version of morals, since it can be socially manipulated, and the better moral theories appeal to something less obviously fluid. Those like Hume and Mill were less concerned than Slote to rock no-one's boat. The only moral intuitions Hume appeals to are our *reflective* approbations and disapprobations of the character traits that people exhibit. He was quite willing to revise his contemporaries' unreflective moral judgments about for example the monastic virtues. His appeal to humanitarian concerns trumped any respect for common moral opinion. He spoke out against slavery before slavery became illegal, and I have elsewhere claimed, advised women on how to claim their rights. If extensiveness of empathy were proposed as a criterion of moral *progress*, I would have less quarrel with Slote. He thinks moral judgments are objective, yet surely knows that his are different from those of earlier slave owners, or those who opposed giving the vote to women. Moral progress seems to lie in revisions of those judgments we take to be sound. When he looks at our duty to help others, Slote underwrites common conviction that we should favor those closest to us, rejecting the consequentialist revisions of people like Peter Singer. By contrast, Hume says that our concentration on those close to us has been wisely ordained by nature, to prevent our altruistic sentiments being "dissipated or lost, for want of a proper limited object". As Hume saw things, we *all* do better if we all first look after those closest to us, and the very closest is oneself. But rightly are we concerned with what is best for all. And Hume thought there was cross-species sympathy, so animals get into Humean ethics in a way it is so far unclear that they do into Slote's. A large class of virtues, for Hume, are those traits agreeable or useful to self. But Slote is avowedly "partialist", accepting of the natural bias of empathy (but not that of natural selfishness?) without looking at how, if at all, this benefits all. The concept of a "general point of view", vital to Hume's version of morality, plays no role in Slote's. This makes his view implausible, at least to those of us who do

think we owe a duty of due concern to all, animals included, and agree with Hume that impartiality is a virtue.

The acid test for Slote's ethics of empathy is whether it can account for reflective convictions that rights, such as the right to property, should usually be respected. Hume thought that, once a convention of property is accepted, we do naturally sympathize with owners' indignation if their property is seized. But since Slote rejects Hume's view that it is custom, or social artifice, which establishes property rights, he should, to convince us of his empathy ethic, show us that we can tell, by empathy, what belongs to whom. He has not even claimed to have done this. All he claims is that, where some right, such as the right to life, is already granted, he can explain why some breaches of it are worse than others. But what established a right in the first place? Hume has no good answer to this with the right to life, but nor has Slote with either it or the right to one's property.

ECE was marred, not only by inconclusive arguments, but by vacillation over what exactly was being claimed. The strong thesis, espoused in MS, that morality reduces to a demand for empathy, is certainly not established in either book, and it is unclear exactly what weaker thesis might be the one on which Slote is sometimes falling back, at least in ECE. His excitement there at the possibility of empathizing with the fetus seems to have carried him away. (ECE: 16) Yes, perhaps one can empathize more easily with the third term fetus than with the first term one, and with the cat's pain more than with the worm's. But so what? To step on a worm and so kill it may not strike us as as bad as driving over a cat, but that seems more to do with our prior greater attachment to cats than to worms than with any fact about the fixed limits of our empathy. Slave owners did not worry much about pain or harm to their slaves. Someone who did love a pet worm, or salamander, would be just as distressed at killing it as someone who runs over her cat, or her valuable slave. Facts about sentimental reactions to harmings are poor evidence for conclusions about wrongings. Otherwise every time we hurt someone, perhaps by criticizing their writings, we should seriously think we have wronged them. Have I wronged Slote by a critical review of these two books? I think not, as long as I have stated his views accurately and criticized them fairly. But then I take justice more seriously than he appears to. We may, as I have in the past claimed, need more than justice, but that does not mean we can

let any sentiment take the place of a sense of justice. Slote has given an ethics of empathy a run for its money, and that was worth doing. I think what his attempt has shown is that it needs supplementation, just as compassion, as a virtue, needs the other 66 virtues Hume thought we recognize, even to do its own work properly. If allied with stupidity, impatience, and foolhardiness, empathy will achieve little. And to aim to share everyone's feelings, both of sorrow and of joy, is to guarantee emotional overload, as well as to neglect virtues like good sense. Empathy is important, but we need more than empathy, to do justice to morality.

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REPLY TO NODDINGS, COTTINGHAM, DRIVER, AND BAIER

Michael Slote

I am grateful to Nel Noddings, John Cottingham, Julia Driver, and Annette Baier for their comments on my work and will discuss their comments in the order just indicated.

Nel Noddings

Nel Noddings and I seem, somewhat surprisingly, to agree more on substance than on nomenclature. She is much more reluctant to use the term “empathy” than I clearly am, and at one point, while indicating that she prefers the term “sympathy”, she mentions that many social scientists use the term “empathy” the way I do. What she doesn’t mention, however, is that, despite the etymological complexities of the matter, *current (American) usage* also favors this widespread academic usage. If you ask ordinary people/Americans which of “I feel your pain” and “I feel sorry for you because of all the pain you’re in” corresponds to empathy and which to sympathy, they say that the former refers to empathy and the latter to sympathy. And that is the way I have used the term myself. However, I buy into the empathy-altruism hypothesis that many psychologists of moral development accept, and that hypothesis holds that (the development of) empathy is requisite to and helps to sustain sympathy, compassion, and altruism more generally.

Noddings also helpfully notes that the process of induction by which a child’s empathy can be evoked and strengthened by a parent is more likely to succeed if there is a good relationship between parent and child, and with this I totally agree. (It’s not a point that I made in *The Ethics of Care and Empathy—ECE*.) And her idea that attention typically precedes the arousal of empathy in particular situations seems very promising—though more needs to be said about how this works.

Noddings goes on to speak of cases in which our empathic tendencies are counteracted by anger with or disgust at what another person says or does. We often are less empathic and less empathically concerned with other people who, say, harm or offend

us or those we love/like, but the moral criterion of empathic caring can accommodate such facts by saying that in those instances a lesser degree of helpfulness (or even, in some instances, certain forms of retaliation or punishment) are morally in order. The psychological literature discusses cases of this sort, and it is thought that the tendency to get angry with and be less helpful toward those, e. g., who hurt people we love is a result of empathy itself. In such cases, the person who does less doesn't, therefore, evince a lack of empathic concern for others and isn't morally criticizable. Similarly, a person who directly harms me naturally makes me angry and less willing to help them, but since (as I mentioned in ECE) empathy normally develops *against a background of persisting self-concern*, the fact that I do less for the person who has harmed me again doesn't show any lack of fully empathic concern for others. I should mention that I talk about these particular issues in my more recent book, *Moral Sentimentalism*—MS (Oxford University Press, 2010, esp. p.99).

Noddings subsequently returns to the subject of attention and, following Iris Murdoch, claims that (adopting) a loving or caring attitude can help us see another person better and more accurately. "It is not," she says, "simply a matter of understanding the other in some entirely objective way. From the perspective of care ethics, it is a matter of seeing the other in the best possible light." [p.11]¹ But I think we need to make some distinctions here. Trying to see someone in the best possible light can help us to appreciate them more accurately if we have (as in the example Noddings borrows from Murdoch) an initial tendency toward devaluing or underestimating them. But as I argue in MS, chapter 10, empathy can also help us to be (more) objective in cases where we don't start off prejudiced, but simply have our own initial opinions or attitudes. The epistemically objective person is someone who, having such opinions or attitudes, is willing and able to empathize with the differing opinions or attitudes of others; or so, at least, I argued in the final chapter of MS. On the other hand, there are times when objectivity isn't called for at all: we expect someone who loves another person to be epistemically prejudiced in their favor, to be less willing to believe ill of them than an objective or impartial judge would be,

¹ Page references in square brackets are to the papers of this symposium.

and this is part of what it *is* to love another person. So a care ethics that recommends love is in effect also recommending against being completely objective, and that makes a lot of sense.

Noddings then discusses our tendency to care more about those whose distress we perceive than about those whose distress we merely know about (she puts this in terms of distance, but I argue in ECE that perceivability is morally closer to the bone). She says she agrees with me that this depends on empathy, but wants to stress evolutionary biology as a means to understanding this phenomenon in a way that I haven't myself done. What I *have* wanted to stress, however, is the connection between empathy and our moral concepts. In ECE and at much greater length in MS, I argue that empathy enters into our moral concepts and that this helps explain why—and justify claims to the effect that—it is morally worse, other things being equal, not to help someone one sees to be in trouble than not to help someone whose difficulties one only knows at second hand. But, of course, evolutionary biology can help us better understand the emergence of moral concepts.

Noddings concludes her comments by mentioning empathic exhaustion (what psychologists sometimes call compassion fatigue). This is a topic on which a great deal more needs to be said that was not said in ECE. For example, if empathy is the criterion of morality, what do we say about cases where someone's empathy is exhausted and they end up being less helpful to others than we think one morally ought to be? This can happen to a nurse or doctor; and MS argues (ch.7) that our moral evaluations may depend on when and how the debilitating exhaustion occurs. If a young nurse was never told about compassion fatigue in nursing school, she may have a moral excuse the first time such a thing happens to her. But after that the excuse goes away, because a genuinely caring person who suffers compassion fatigue and ends up for a while not helping those they are supposed to help will take steps not to let this happen again in the future—e.g., by “budgeting” their concerned involvement and their caring activities in the future. A sentimental care ethics can account for what we believe about such cases.

John Cottingham

I think John Cottingham underestimates the resistance that many ethicists would put up to

acknowledging a central place for empathy in the moral life, and the fact that we agree as to that centrality actually represents, I think, a large area of common philosophical belief. But Cottingham questions whether empathy or empathic caring can really constitute the “foundation stone” of morality, and it is important to consider those doubts.

Cottingham wonders, to begin with, whether the foundations I have laid are really distinct (enough) from those utilitarianism provides or seeks to provide for morality, and in this connection he mentions the issue of whether it would be right to prohibit neo-Nazi hate speech in a town (Skokie, Illinois) where there were many Holocaust survivors. He rightly notes that my treatment of the case accords basically with what a utilitarian would say about it (and differs from what Kantian liberals want to say about it), but I am a bit baffled about why he thinks that calls the distinctiveness of my empathic caring approach into question. After all, even Kantians and Rawlsians agree with utilitarianism about many kinds of examples. Cottingham says that consequences rather than empathy are doing the explanatory/justificatory work in my treatment of the Skokie case, but part of my criticism of the liberal approach was to note their lack of consideration, of empathy, for the Holocaust survivors. That doesn't sound like consequentialism to me.

Cottingham then moves on to my discussion of the case of miners who are trapped underground. I say that our empathic tendencies will lead us to want to save those miners rather than spend the same money it would cost us to do so on safety equipment that would save more lives in the future. But I then add that if the number of future lives to be saved by installing safety equipment is enormously greater than the number of miners who are now trapped underground, the sheer numbers will or might engage our empathy strongly enough to make us prefer to install the equipment rather than save the presently-trapped miners. Cottingham says that this is a concession, even a caving in, to consequentialism, but that judgment baffles me once again, and a parallel example may help to explain why I am baffled. Most deontologists who hold it would be wrong to kill one person to save five also believe it could be right to kill one to save some much larger number of people from certain death. This doesn't make them into consequentialists, and neither does my concession, my insistence, that at a certain point sheer numbers can outweigh the empathic force of contemporaneity constitute any kind of acceptance of consequentialism. My insistence that

contemporaneity makes a (some) basic difference to our empathic reactions and to our justified moral judgments stakes out a position that is clearly different from and in many cases opposed to the dictates of impartialist/utilitarian consequentialism.

Cottingham then takes up my treatment of deontology. He questions whether my empathic approach can really help us understand what is wrong with stealing from rich people or corporations. After all, even if the robber causes some distress, that distress may be minimal, so one may wonder how my approach can explain what is wrong with such theft. But I think we are empathically somewhat averse to causing/inflicting (as opposed to “merely” allowing) small amounts of distress or pain, so I don’t think the empathy approach is unable to call such stealing wrong. However, Cottingham may be thinking that on my view the stealing, even if wrong, is a morally less serious wrong than it actually is and is generally thought to be, and if he is, then I have to disagree with him. We don’t think stealing small amounts from rich people or corporations is morally as serious as stealing from those who really need the money, and my empathic approach precisely allows us to make that sort of distinction. Cottingham also says that we are likely to be more distressed when someone loses his property as a result of a preventable flood than when (and if) they are burglarized, and notes our belief that the latter is (nonetheless) considered the greater moral offense. But this doesn’t work against my empathy-based account of deontology, because it shifts from the point of view of an agent to that of a spectator. As a spectator, the damage done by a flood may be more upsetting than that done by a burglar, but as agents we all are or should be more reluctant to burgle than to allow a small flood or burglary to happen because it would take too much effort, say, to prevent it.

Cottingham also says that my phrase “empathically averse” sounds like a “logical hybrid” between psychological and moral notions, and that makes him wonder whether my idea that we are “empathically more averse” to causing harm than to allowing it can really help explain moral deontology. But I think a (re)consideration of what (following psychologist Martin Hoffman in his *Empathy and Moral Development*, Cambridge University Press, 2000) I say in ECE about “inductive discipline” might help allay his worries. If one calls a child’s attention to the harm or pain they have caused another child, they can be made to feel bad (a kind of rudimentary guilt) about what they have done, and

if one does this on several occasions, the child can become more empathic with others and develop a psychological resistance to future harming. This whole psychological process doesn't require any use or mentioning of moral notions (like saying "it is wrong to hurt people"), and the psychological resistance that is thereby induced is just the kind of thing I mean by "empathic aversion". Cottingham also says (more generally) that it is possible to be empathically less engaged by what is morally more serious, but I don't think this causes any problems for my approach. Some people are empathically incomplete: they feel for their own family, for example, but not for other people; and, of course, such a person (someone in the Mafia) can feel empathically less engaged by the killing of strangers than by forgetting to take his child to the circus. On my view, the standard for moral evaluation is fully developed empathic concern for others, and I think *that* sort of concern does line up with our considered moral judgments. (There is also the question of what to say about cases in which the fully empathic person's empathy temporarily flags or fails—but I have already said something about this in responding to Nel Noddings, and the issue is discussed at much greater length in MS, chapters 6 and 7.)

Cottingham goes on to express doubts about my treatment of the obligation to respect people's autonomy, and it is clear that we differ very deeply about what respect involves. He says that "to respect someone is to allow them to pursue their projects *even when you utterly fail to empathize with them.*" [p.15] Such tolerance is, he thinks, a "true virtue", but I beg to disagree. Following Susan Brison, I say in ECE (p.65n.) that this kind of tolerance is widely overestimated as a virtue—and I believe that the greater virtue and/or respect consists in or involves actually *listening to and hearing* what those who disagree with one have to say. It cannot be fully respectful not to be willing and able to understand things from other people's points of view. Like many others, Cottingham sees those who deny religious freedoms as trampling on independently established or justifiable rights, but in my view what is wrong with that denial involves a human failure of empathy and sympathy. And that actually strikes me (perhaps this isn't surprising) as the morally more humane way of looking at the issues.

Cottingham speaks of a general reservation he has about sentimentalist care ethics, given the gap it seems to allow between psychological descriptions of empathic tendencies

and “moral or normative facts about how we should behave.” [p.16] And he illustrates his worry by reference to my discussion of the difference between killing at close hand (as in the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War) and killing via aerial bombardment. But Rita Manning has convinced me that the relevant issues here are more complex than my discussion allowed (Cottingham mentions similar considerations); and I now don’t know what should be said about the specific moral issues about killing in wartime that I discussed in ECE. (A plausible moral theory sometimes has its work cut out for it.) But the general point he makes about a gap between psychological hypothesis and moral evaluation certainly needs to be addressed, and as he himself indicates, the main worry here concerns how our psychological feelings and tendencies can be(come) normative. Cottingham sees that, as a sentimentalist, I don’t have to argue that moral claims are *rationaly* binding (common sense doesn’t really take them to be so); but since I do claim that moral claims bind independently of the wishes or desires of those who are bound, he wants to know how that can be possible in sentimentalist terms. My answer that the sentimentalist standard of morality is the fully empathic individual, so that a less empathic person can have a moral obligation to do what he or she has no particular desire to do, doesn’t fully satisfy him. He wonders how the feelings someone else has or could have can have authority over me. Again, however, we have to be careful about the idea of authority. I don’t have to claim that moral norms have a rational authority, and in fact I don’t believe that any notion specifically of authority is necessarily crucial to questions of moral validity and normativity. For example, Cottingham thinks that the sentimentalist may need to invoke a notion of moral authority to the effect that fully empathic feelings “ought to be felt” [p.18], but I have strong doubts about whether the sentimentally-inclined have or need to have such thoughts, and in fact I find it difficult to make clear sense of what such thoughts actually amount to.

But how, then, do I allow for normative claims, based in facts about empathy, that validly apply to individuals who aren’t empathically motivated? At the end of the book I sketch an answer to this question (one that I developed at great length subsequently in *Moral Sentimentalism*). I argue there that we have reason to think empathy plays a role in our (understanding of) moral concepts and judgments/utterances. But then, if one needs

empathy in order to be able to claim, fully, that things are right or wrong, that would help explain why moral judgments are inherently motivating, and it would also move us toward an explanation of how there can be moral obligations independently of whether a give person is empathic enough to want to adhere to them. If the reason why someone lacks empathy for his daughter is that he is or is close to being a psychopath who lacks empathy for *anyone*, then that person isn't capable of making moral judgments or (fully) understanding the valid normative claim that he is under a moral obligation vis-à-vis his daughter; but that is no more problematic than a blind person's being unable to (fully) understand valid claims about objective redness. That inability doesn't undercut the value and objectivity of what others who possess the concept of redness can say making use of that concept.

On the other hand, the man who has no desire to help his daughter because he is preoccupied, say, with a second marriage and a new family can presumably make moral judgments. And if he is empathic enough for that, he can presumably be brought to recognize his obligation to help her. In that case a desire to help her can perhaps be (re)awakened via the same psychological/empathic processes that allowed him to have moral concepts in the first place. I say more about this in MS, but the questions John Cottingham has raised here are certainly important, and it is clearly important for the sentimentalist—or any theorist of morality—to be able to answer them.

At the end of his comments, Cottingham allows that the sentimentalist can claim that empathy is “the ultimate value which serves to ground other [moral] values.” [p.18] That is something I do indeed claim and want to claim, but it perhaps helps if one sees that semantic considerations about the role of empathy in moral concepts reinforce sentimentalist normative claims about the ultimate and pervasive role of empathy in making actions right or wrong. Cottingham thinks I and we all should be more open to the possibility that there is no single major ultimate moral/normative value or standard, but philosophers have reason, other things being equal, to prefer a unified and unifying approach, and I believe ECE and MS together give us some reason to see empathy as helping us to make all the plausible and uncontroversial moral distinctions we customarily make. This puts my approach, as Cottingham notes, in league with the Christian ethic of

love (though that ethic is impartialist, and empathy works partialistically); and as he also points out, the appeal of such differing forms of sentimentalism doesn't have to presuppose religious belief or piety. ECE argues, in effect, for a kind of secular sentimentalism that picks up on and highlights our own deeply human empathic tendencies and resources. This constitutes a challenging systematic alternative to ethical rationalism, and I think we both agree that such an approach deserves to be developed and/or explored further in the future.

Julia Driver

I am grateful to Julia Driver for raising the issue of autism so forcefully at the beginning of her comments. I have recently been feeling the need to say more than ECE (or MS) says about the moral capabilities of people with autism or Asperger's syndrome, and I am going to take the opportunity to do that here. But I don't propose to follow the exact contours of Driver's own very interesting discussion, but will try to draw a picture of the central issues in my own way. Similarly, my subsequent response to other aspects or parts of Driver's comments will not respond to her discussion point by point, but will in any event seek to answer the issues she raises in a somewhat systematic way.

But first to a misunderstanding that we can use to shape consequent discussion. Driver speaks of "the sort of empathic skills Slote insists on," but my discussion in ECE precisely *distinguishes* between empathic skills and the question whether someone is capable of empathy. (Look carefully at the passage Driver quotes from pp.126-127 of my book.) Someone with Asperger's may be incapable of picking up cues from their human environment, but that may also be true, to a large extent, of a blind person, and I think most people would agree that the lack or loss of sight(edness) doesn't make one a less empathic person. That assumption, at any rate, seems very plausible to me, so I think the issue of how morally important empathy is can't be resolved by focusing on issues of defective cognitive/perceptual processing.

How, then, can it be resolved in the particular case of autistic or, for that matter, blind individuals? Well, blind people can be read to or can themselves read via the Braille method, and is there any reason why such a person shouldn't "feel the pain" of some fictional character who is vividly portrayed to them in a book? This is not the usual kind of

emotional contagion, the kind that people discussing empathy most frequently focus on, but I think there should be no doubt that empathy of an emotional(ly engaged) kind is involved here, and the question then arises why such a thing couldn't or doesn't occur with high-functioning autistic individuals. If it can or does, then there is every reason to regard many autistic people as capable of empathy, and the account of moral motivation and sensitivity offered in ECE would then regard them as differing in an important way from psychopaths. As Driver notes, psychopaths are good at getting inside people's heads, but they don't have the kind of emotional reactions that occur when we feel someone's pain. So if we tie the capacity for morality to that kind of receptive emotional capability, we may be able to say that autistic people are capable of morality in a way that psychopaths aren't. And my kind of sentimentalism would be more than content to make this sort of distinction on these sorts of grounds.

Of course, what we have just said depends on the assumption that autistic people can become emotionally involved in someone's fate independently of the usual perceptual cues, but we are in fact not limited to literary examples if we want to show that autistic people can be capable of empathic emotional involvement. In my response to John Cottingham, I mentioned the process or "technique" of inductive discipline by which parents can get children to become more empathic and caring. The parents get the child to focus on the pain or harm they have caused another child, and this will make most children feel bad about what they have done. And I can think of no reason why something like this may not also be possible for many autistic children. Such children may not pick up on the usual perceptual cues, but if their parents can explain things to them, then they may possibly be brought to understand the pain or harm that they have—perhaps inadvertently, or perhaps in anger—caused another child. And if learning about this makes them feel bad about what they have done, then they are capable of a kind of rudimentary guilt that psychopaths presumably never feel. So if some or many autistic people can be brought to feel and understand things in this way, I think there is no reason to deny them a capacity for empathy and for morality. But if they somehow turn out *not* to be capable of feeling bad/guilty about things they have done, then my kind of sentimentalism can and should feel comfortable with denying them a fully developed capacity for morality. To be sure, they

may conform to social, legal, and moral norms out of a desire to fit in with or please those around them, but if that is the most they are capable of desiring or feeling vis-à-vis other people and their surrounding circumstances, then surely there is a point to denying that they have complete(ly) moral motivation. And moral sentimentalism has no reason, I think, to shy from such a conclusion. But let me now consider some other issues Driver raises.

Driver notes my assumption (following Hoffman) that one can empathize with (the condition or situation of) someone who doesn't yet know they have (say) terminal cancer, and she says that this involves a different kind of empathy from the empathy that works via emotional contagion. But even if the cancer victim doesn't yet have any negative feelings that can spread via contagion, one can still be empathically/emotionally receptive vis-à-vis their situation. And such receptivity (univocally) defines the basic kind of empathy I think is necessary to morality and absent in psychopaths. It can occur when someone's actual pain spreads by contagion to or into others, but it also occurs when someone empathically identifies with the woes of some purely fictional character or when we empathically/receptively feel the badness of the situation of someone who doesn't (yet) know how bad their situation is. *Pace* Driver, there is only one fundamental kind of empathy involved here, even if some of its instances require greater cognitive/emotional maturity than do others.

But doesn't such empathy have its moral limits? Doesn't it frequently have to be corrected if we are to do what is morally right, and doesn't that show the limits of an approach like my own that puts so much weight on empathy? Driver certainly thinks so, and she proposes various rational and moral mechanisms that might be capable of doing the work that she thinks empathy unaided cannot perform. But such moves don't, I think, give sufficient credit to what empathy (in some sense) on its own can do. The way to correct morally misguided or inadequate empathy is not, I believe, with new and different mechanisms or procedures, but with more or more thoroughgoing empathy. Let me explain.

As I mentioned in my reply to John Cottingham, some people feel (receptive) empathy with the joys and sorrows of those they know or are intimate with, but feel very little toward mere strangers or (distant) groups of people they have very little knowledge of. And such people will often or sometimes act wrongly because of their complete bias in

favor of those they know. But Hoffman points out that as we mature, we become capable of empathy with distant groups or individuals, and it seems to me (and has seemed to others) that an adequate moral education should involve empathically sensitizing individuals to issues and people beyond their immediate environment. I spend a lot of time in ECE and MS describing how this can occur, and so I think that the best corrective to morally objectionable empathic biases is a larger or deeper training or education in empathy. To be sure, this process is more than likely to leave us preferring our own folk to people in distant groups, but if it leaves us with substantial and genuine empathic concern for the latter, it may arguably have accomplished all it needs to accomplish in order to produce or create (or whatever the right word is) morally decent, caring individuals.

The case of the triage physician that Driver describes is just a more complex instance of what I have just been saying. The moral distinctions and clarifications that bear on such cases are in fact very similar to what one needs to say about compassion fatigue, an issue that I have described briefly above, in my replies to Noddings and Cottingham, and that I have discussed at great length in MS (chapter 7). Given considerations of length, I hope I may at this point just refer the reader to that discussion. But let me also mention one final consideration that may be relevant to Driver's comments and to her doubts about empathy. Driver speaks of moral judgment as capable of exercising a corrective influence on our limited or biased empathic tendencies, and she gestures in the direction of a somewhat Humean theory of such judgment (or "utterances"). But MS offers a general account of moral concepts/judgments in terms of the idea of second-order empathy, empathy with someone's abundance or lack of empathic concern for others, and I believe such an account might help allay some of Driver's worries about the adequacy of empathy-based moral sentimentalism.

Annette Baier

Annette Baier's review of ECE and of my more recent MS is marred by some *ad hominem*s; but she raises some important issues, and where she misunderstands what I have written, I think it is worth indicating what the misunderstanding is or involves.

Early on in her review, Baier says that "[i]n ECE the relevant empathy seemed

limited to our sharing of others' distress....But in MS empathy includes sharing of joys as well as hurts." [p.29] But although ECE focused on negative feelings, I never said or intended to say that empathy is limited to such feelings. Moreover, I made it very clear in both ECE and MS that I follow Martin Hoffman in assuming that we can empathize not just with *feelings*, but also with someone's fortunate or unfortunate *condition* or *situation*, and in the final chapter of the later book, I even speak of empathy with or for someone's state of ignorance or intellectual point of view. Baier then asks whether we can empathize, say, with the rapist's pleasure at raping, and that is a very interesting question. There is something very cold-hearted about the way a rapist can feel pleasure "at the expense" of his victim, so on my view, a normal empathic person might momentarily feel the rapist's pleasure, but will also be empathically chilled by what it shows about the rapist's cold-heartedness and thus disapprove of it. And disapproval of and anger with someone who hurts others clearly tend to interfere with empathically sharing or continuing to share their (pleasurable) feelings. In addition, and as I mentioned above, our empathic concern for someone's welfare diminishes if we think they have harmed us or people we care about (see MS, p.99), and so (I hold that) a normal person will feel lessened empathic concern for the welfare of a rapist or perhaps even none at all.

Baier goes on to claim that the rapist (or pornography-fancier) has warm feelings toward his victim, but here I am somewhat perplexed. Such a person will derive pleasure from raping and seeing their victim's reaction, but that isn't necessarily the same as warmth or warm feeling. As I point out in MS, the warmth we feel at contemplating a friend's warmth toward her friend can be "teary-eyed" and not necessarily or predominantly pleasurable. So I don't agree with Baier or think there is any reason to hold that the rapist has warm feelings toward or about his victim. However, Baier also points out that the rapist can feel hot and excited when he rapes, and I certainly wouldn't want to deny that. But there is a cold-heartedness, nonetheless, in or about the way the rapist views his victims—e.g., in the case of serial rapists there is presumably no guilt or sadness after the fact, and there is all along a chilling underlying lack of (non-instrumental) concern for the welfare of their victims. On the theory MS defends, that explains why we normally disapprove of the rapist and find their actions (at the very least) morally wrong and bad. Baier's final point on this

topic is that when we approve of an individual who feels empathic concern for someone who is (say) fearful, we share the fear and therefore have a cold feeling rather than a warm one. But even if we momentarily share cold fear the way we can momentarily share the pleasure of a sadist, our knowledge of the fearful person's presumably dangerous situation can arouse our agential empathic concern for their welfare and thus our warmth, and an observer can clearly be warmed by and approve of that aroused warm agential concern. None of this entails, nor should it, that the observer will be warmed by or approve of the agent's mere sharing of the fearful person's cold fear. So I don't think there is any particular problem here for the sentimentalism proposed in MS.

Baier next asserts that I don't say much about the need to balance the (empathic) sympathies we may feel in different directions; but this ignores ECE's discussion (p.68) of the Skokie example, where we have to weigh the feelings of neo-Nazis against those of Holocaust survivors. I indicate there how empathy can play a role in resolving such issues, and in both ECE and MS I speak of several other cases where a balancing of sympathies or empathies has to occur. Baier also notes, quite correctly, that I haven't said much about moral vegetarianism and claims that my view commits me to that doctrine. And perhaps it does. But I think the matter is more complicated for sentimentalism than Baier supposes and in any event hope to be able to discuss this whole issue at some point in the future. (Indeed, I think the general question of our obligations to animals is a very difficult one, and I need and hope to pay more attention to it in the future.)

Baier then says that I seem to assume we don't empathize with past or future people. But in fact ECE (p.45) makes it very clear that one *can* empathize with future (groups of) individuals and merely insists that such empathizing comes less readily or strongly than in the case where danger or pleasure to a group or individual is present-tense. And there is absolutely no reason to think we can't empathize with past people (or the past sufferings or enjoyments of present people) as well.

Let me next turn to Annette Baier's discussion of my views on deontology and the law. She quite accurately notes that MS (and to a lesser extent ECE) tries to work out a conception of distributive (legal and social) justice in sentimentalist terms, but leaves issues of corrective justice fairly well untouched. In MS (p.136) I note this lacuna and say that

readers might be able to figure out for themselves how (my kind of) sentimentalism could be applied to issues of tort or criminal law/justice on the basis of what MS *does* say about distributive justice. But there is no substitute for my actually working things out.

However, Baier goes on to say that my account can't explain (or justify) deontology as it applies to individual action(s). According to Baier, I explain why certain actions of causing harm are morally worse, other things being equal, than actions of allowing harm, but say nothing to indicate why it is wrong to kill one innocent person in order to prevent two, say, from dying. But this is not correct. In ECE I argued that what shows a lack of fully empathic concern for others is wrong and said that a failure to save someone one sees to be in trouble goes more against the grain of empathy than a failure to save someone who one simply knows to be in trouble somewhere. It follows that (other things being equal) if one prefers to save someone whose difficulties one merely knows about rather than someone whose difficulties one perceives, one acts wrongly, *and I assumed that the reader of ECE would pick up on this implication*. By the same token, ECE says that killing goes more against the grain of empathy than allowing to die, and given the just-mentioned criterion of wrongness, it also follows that it is wrong to kill one person in order to save two. Again, I expected the reader to pick up on that implication, but because Baier (and perhaps other readers) didn't, it may help to have now made this point explicit. At any rate, ECE and MS (less fully) do offer an explanation of and justification for deontological claims about rightness and wrongness—though, certainly, not every interesting or complex issue that can arise in that area was discussed or touched upon.

Baier next addresses the differences between Hume's view of approval/disapproval and my own. As she notes, Hume allows for disapprobation or disapproval not only at coldness and cruelty, but at many other faults that aren't faults of the heart, and my talk of moral approval and disapproval is precisely limited to issues of the heart. But the fact is that I want to distinguish between moral approval and other forms of approval and, more significantly, between moral virtues and other sorts of desirable personal traits. Hume's theory of approval and disapproval relates these attitudes to the likely *effects* of various traits or actions, and since wit and humor can have (let us simplifyingly assume) the same sort of good effects as benevolence or compassion, there is no reason not to approve them

all from the impartial standpoint that Hume saw as foundational to moral thought. However, we ordinarily don't think of wit and humor as virtues, much less moral virtues, and we commonly distinguish between moral virtues like kindness and non-moral ones like industriousness and prudence (in the ordinary sense). Hume's general theoretical approach made him downplay such distinctions, but in criticizing Hume's approach to approval and disapproval, MS sought, among other things, to reestablish the distinction between the moral and the non-moral in a way that Hume wouldn't have been comfortable with. By focusing on cold and warm motivation as the basis for empathic disapproval and approval, moral approval is distinguished from the positive (and approving?) attitude we have to wit and prudence or cleverness, and moral judgments themselves are thus marked off from other forms of ethical evaluation and from non-ethical evaluations as well. This is reminiscent of Kant, though, of course, my arguments for the distinctiveness of the moral are made on a very different basis from anything to be found in Kant or Kantian thought in general. I think our ordinary thinking marks the moral realm as deeply different from the non-moral, and that fact supports the kind of approach taken in MS over Hume's less discriminating view. However, this difference also means that MS and ECE are much less comprehensive than Hume's account of morality and the virtues. I say things about moral virtue, but have nothing much to say about non-moral virtues or about "personality traits" like wit and a sunny disposition. That just shows you how much importance I really do place on the moral as such.

Baier claims that my semantics for moral terms is unpersuasive and that what I say about the wrongness of theft is also unpersuasive. But it would have been better if she had told us why she wasn't persuaded and had grappled with my actual arguments. And let me also mention one further misunderstanding. Baier says that my "version of morality is the Christian one," [p.36] rather than anything closely resembling Hume's approach. But Christian morality is impartialistic: we are to love everyone equally; and that not only goes against Hume's views, but in the deepest ways contradicts what a sentimentalist theory that relies on empathy wants to say.

Later in her discussion, Annette Baier says that empathy is neither necessary nor sufficient for benevolence. Now I made it clear in MS that one doesn't have to be actually

feeling empathic warmth in order to perform a benevolent action, but the psychologists' empathy-altruism hypothesis does hold, on the basis of a good deal of evidence, that genuine altruism depends on (the development of individual) empathy. Of course, Hume thought that ordinary benevolence can be very weak and fail to guarantee what morality requires in given circumstances, and this is a problem that contemporary sentimentalism needs to wrestle with. But wrestle with it I believe I did in MS (and to a lesser extent in ECE). Hume treats empathy/sympathy as coming naturally to us and regards benevolence as an instinct, so it is perhaps understandable that he said little or nothing about how empathy and benevolence can be taught or developed. The recent literature of psychology and philosophy has a lot, however, to say about this topic, and the relevance to moral education of books, films, or television and of parental or school moral training is discussed in that literature and in both ECE and MS. We have to work hard in order to (help people) overcome certain natural impediments to the helpfulness morality recommends, but that just shows you that a sentimentalist approach like my own very much needs an account of moral education and development. And that is why I spent so much time in ECE and, especially, in MS on those topics (though Baier never refers to those discussions).

Baier also criticizes my account of morality on the grounds that it has so little to say about when it is permissible to hurt or harm another person. In relationships, for example, some harmings or hurtings are morally acceptable, while others aren't, and I never went into this issue. That is correct, but it would not be a difficult thing to do. To wound or kill a threatening lover may be morally acceptable in sentimentalist terms, and to physically (or sexually) abuse a spouse or child will always be wrong. But does Baier really suppose that a theory like the one I present can't effectively handle issues about harming or causing pain in relationships? Every theory allows for a "normal science" phase in which many substantive and sometimes difficult problems are dealt with, but I judged and still judge that it was more important to deal with the basic theoretical/moral parameters before spending too much time on such specifics. I have tried to show that sentimentalism can handle the sorts of basic questions any philosophical theorist would want to see a normative-cum-metaethical theory deal with. But I certainly haven't dealt with every important normative or semantic issue.

Toward the end of her discussion Baier considers the fact that empathy can be socially manipulated and claims that (actual) empathy is a poor basis for a “reflective version of morals.” [p.39] Better moral theories, she says, appeal to something less fluid. But the moral criterion of fully empathic concern for others is obviously not the same thing as the empathic dispositions of any one person or of any given society, and the former may represent a fixed and permanent (valid) standard that given people or societies may in changeable ways only more or less approximate to.

Baier goes on to say: “[i]f extensiveness of empathy were proposed as a criterion of moral *progress*, I would have less quarrel with Slote.” [p.39] But I don’t see why she thinks that isn’t my view. Of course, empathy has to be learned or educated for, and it is clearly possible to feel empathy in some directions but not others (as Baier’s example of the Scythians attests). But let’s also be clear that it is very hard to correct deficiencies of empathy, especially in adults. ECE and MS argue that patriarchal societies show a lack of empathic respect for girls’ and women’s ideas and aspirations, and the ideal of a society in which everyone’s ideas and aspirations *are* empathically respected seems to me to count as a forward-looking view of what justice and morality demand. Our moral intuitions may largely depend on empathy, but many of them can be misguided because they result from one-sided or deficient empathic concerns—and as MS takes pains to argue, if people’s empathic concerns are limited, say, to their own group, that may very well be a reason to deny that they have fully developed moral concepts.

Pace Baier, therefore, I don’t think my moral and meta-ethical views particularly lend themselves to social conservatism. Nor does my claim, in MS, that moral claims can be objective(ly valid or true) entail that people are generally reasonable in their moral opinions. Baier seems to think I am committed to something like that conclusion, but the claim of objectivity (in a very standard sense) simply means that moral truth is independent of people’s beliefs about or attitudes toward morality. Objectivity doesn’t at all mean that people are going to easily cotton onto the objective truth about things, and the difficulty of getting people to acknowledge the wrongness of slavery or of certain sorts of treatment of women is strong evidence of the difficulty, in many kinds of cases, of coming to moral truth. If a sentimentalism based in empathy is correct, then there are social and

psychological impediments to the recognition of certain moral truths (like those we learn from feminism) that straight consequentialism and utilitarianism don't as readily reckon with, and although it would be nice to have a criterion of morality that everyone in every benighted time could apply as a corrective to that benightedness (and in a way this is what utilitarianism purports or appears to offer), it seems, unfortunately, more realistic to suppose that the ultimate criterion of morality will be something difficult to apply or recognize. It was difficult for slaveholders and patriarchs to recognize the wrongness of much of what they were doing, and it seems to me that a proper criterion of moral right and wrong should be able to explain or at least accommodate that fact—rather than assume or entail that we can all, with effort, figure out what it is right or wrong for us to do. So I think a criterion of morality that ties it to fully empathic concern for others points us (non-conservatively) toward a future of moral progress, but can also help explain why moral progress and moral problem-solving are often so difficult.

At the end of her review, Baier says that empathy and compassion need supplementation by other virtues in order to do “[their] own work properly.” [p.41] She adds: “If allied with stupidity, impatience, and foolhardiness, empathy will achieve little.” [p.41] And of course, as far as it goes, this is correct. But one would need to be a kind of consequentialist in order to turn these ideas against an ethics of empathic caring. First, most of us agree with Kant, rather than with typical consequentialists, that what one actually achieves shouldn't be considered the criterion of whether one has acted morally. So if a person really is unintelligent and has no way (yet) of knowing that, their empathic concern to help another may not achieve its purpose; but that fact, though extremely regrettable, presumably doesn't automatically show that they have acted wrongly, and the kind of sentimentalism I advocate can explain why in a way that consequentialism would have a difficult time doing.

Of course, if a person learns that they are lacking in intelligence and is really concerned to help others, they may learn their lesson from one or two failures and not bite off more than they can morally chew in the future. In fact, if they don't learn that lesson, their genuine concern to help others is criterially called into question, and something similar seems to be true about impatience and foolhardiness. If through impatience one

messes up an attempt, based on empathic concern, to help others, then, if one is a genuinely empathic and caring person, one will take that mistake (as we say) to heart, and, as MS points out with respect to the similar case of compassion fatigue, this is in fact *criterial* of what it is to be empathically concerned about others in a full-blown way. So according to an empathy-based sentimentalism, a fully empathic and concerned person will tend to be patient (and hard-working and not foolhardy) on behalf of others—and (to repeat) if, despite relevantly virtuous efforts, they fail to achieve their goals, an intuitively plausible morality will want to say, as I also want to say, that they have not acted wrongly. We may seek and (in some sense) morality may seek to achieve or produce certain good results, but I think Baier is mistaken to use the possibility of its achieving little as an argument against taking empathic concern for others as the criterion of what is *morally* right and wrong.

In any event, and given all the things I have said in this reply, Annette Baier might want to think again about the merits and prospects of the general sentimentalist project undertaken in ECE and MS.

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